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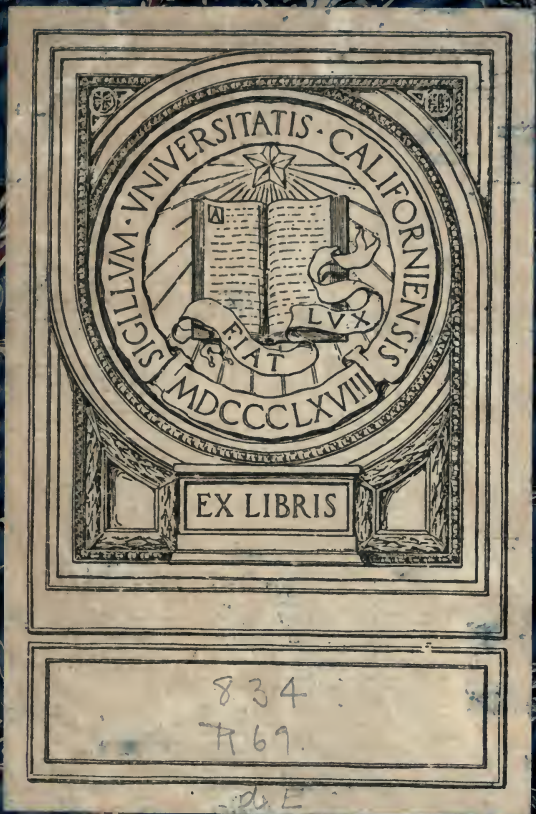
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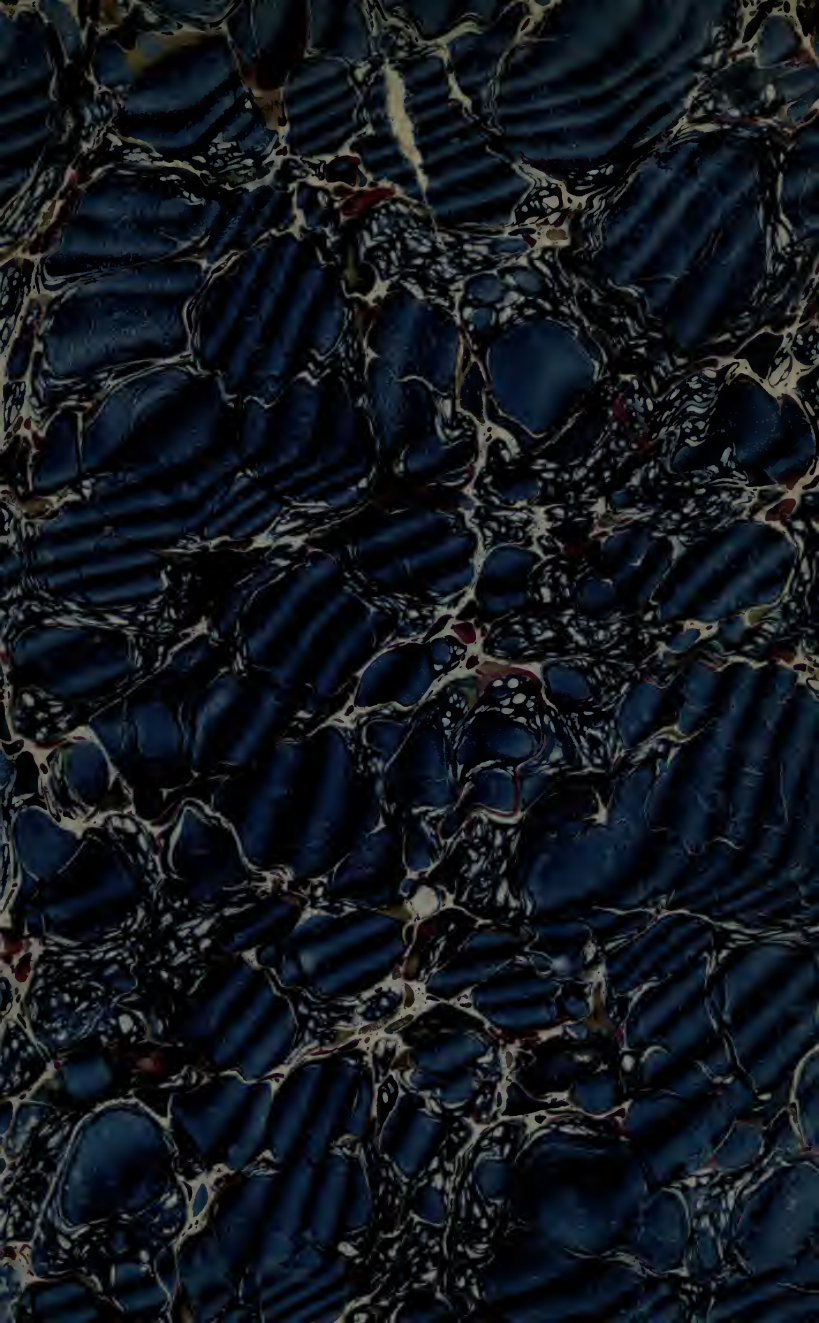

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DEVAYTIS

DEVAYTIS

A Novel

BY

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'ANIMA VILIS,' 'DISTAFF,' ETC.

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DEVAYTIS

CHAPTER I

The sun was sinking behind an oak grove situated between the rivers Dubissa and Eynia, in a country abounding with holy oaks, snakes and amber, objects held in veneration by the inhabitants.

It peeped forth from behind a grey cloud, bidding good-night, with its last beams of golden rays, to the old Zmudzian village that stood on the shore of the stream, surrounded by linden trees and inhabited by petty-noblemen.

It was Saturday evening, a delightful time for labouring people and cattle.

From the fields came old-fashioned ploughs, working oxen, waggons, small horses, tall young men with scythes on their shoulders, swarthy, gold-haired girls with songs on their lips, and children driving cows and sheep to their rest under the straw roofs of their stables.

At length the village was quiet, life was

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concentrated in the rooms and courtyards; here and there were heard sounds of fifes and fiddles, the laughter of young people, noise and calling, while the storks stood up on their nests, talking like preachers to that human crowd.

Peter Woynat's house, the most important from its size and wealth, was also the quietest. Four people were seated at the table, on which was a supper served in large enamelled porringers; the smell of onions and fresh bread filled the room. The master sat in a corner, between two windows, a thin, bent old man, clad in a grey coat; he ate slowly and spoke growlingly to the neighbour who sat on his right.

The guest, a pale, dark-haired youth of medium size, was dressed the same as Woynat, half like a petty noble, half like a peasant.

Whilst eating, he related something in a sad, quiet voice, looking as though he were afraid and downtrodden. From time to time he raised his eyes and looked in such a way that it was impossible to tell whether he were looking at the window or at the people sitting opposite him.

The others did not speak. The golden-haired girl with red cheeks turned her profile to the light and leaned through the open window, plucking the purple fruit from a cherry-tree that grew near the wall. A

man's straw hat lay in her lap, and she stuck the cherries round the band, smiling at her prank.

The young man who sat beside her glanced now at her sunburnt but dainty hands, now at her lovely head and regular features, and was silent. He was of gigantic size, and well-dressed, his clothing being made of fine dark stuff; he was sitting bent in the shadow, and his long hair falling over his forehead covered half his face.

Sometimes, growing tired of his silent gaze, the girl would throw a ripe cherry at him. Then from beneath her fair hair something like a spark shone in her blue eyes, but it quickly faded. As for the youth, he took the cherries in his sunburnt hands but did not eat them; it seemed as though he would regret doing so.

The supper over, an old servant cleared the table and the men took out their pipes. Then the host spoke for the first time to his silent guest.

'Have you any imported tobacco?'

'Imported tobacco is bad,' answered the man, at the same time pulling out a leather pouch.

The old man plunged his bony fingers into it, and filling his pipe, muttered,—

'All the Certwans are misers; they would sooner lose a tooth than spend a penny.'

The girl made a grimace.

'Perhaps grandpa thinks he brought me a present, but he is mistaken.'

The culprit was silent, but the sad youth took his part.

'He did not sell his own goods. The oxen belonged to the estate of Poswicie. He had no money to buy the present, for what Mr Certwan allowed him for expenses was barely enough to live on.'

'The old man is as good as the young. They are well matched! The old man thinks that he is very clever and his son is stupid. They make him work as though he were an ox.'

'It will soon be over, however, when he is married and settles down to live with you in Sandwile,' continued the defender, smiling sadly, as though at a funeral.

The girl blushed like a cherry, the old man caressed his bald head, and, being slightly pacified, looked at the silent giant.

'Well, I help him as much as I can; he is my sister's son. I wished to adopt him for my own child, but the old man would not consent. I could not help it; he would not let me have him, and now he comes of himself.'

The girl made another grimace, which seemed to say, 'Yes, you would have seen him had I not been here;' but the old man did not notice it.

'We shall be able to arrange everything

satisfactorily, provided he be not in great haste. "Haste is a thief" our fathers used to say. In the autumn Certwan must find another overseer for Skomont, for Mark will start work for himself. It's time. How old are you?'

'Twenty-eight last spring.'

'By the time I was as old as you are I had four children, only they all died. Of course I had some common sense in my head; I was neither afraid of a step-mother, nor did obey I everyone. Thus I became a man.'

'Grandpa, Mark will become a man too,' rejoined the girl, 'he is so big.'

'You are stupid!' muttered the old man, threateningly.

She laughed lightly.

'Yet every day you say to the neighbours, "When Mark takes my farm you will see what a young head and strong arms will make of it." Mr Gral is my witness.'

She looked teasingly at the young man; under her look he lowered his eyes and sighed slightly.

'You are stupid!' repeated Woynat, rising from his chair.

They all rose. The girl rushed from the room first, and a little later a sound of singing came from the garden.

'Beyond the forest,
Beyond the mount,
A house stands by the stream:

There a girl,
A berry like,
Lives, like an angel in Paradise.'

Mark moved slowly from the bench.

'I must be going,' said he.

'Are you longing for your step-mother?' muttered Woynat.

'No, but father must be uneasy about me.'

'Not at all. I heard that Witold has come for his holidays, and the girl must have returned from Ryga.'

'She was home when I left.'

'So! Then there are plenty of them without you. To-morrow is Sunday. Better rest with us.'

'Very well, uncle.'

At that moment the gate from the garden creaked and a stranger's voice sounded in the courtyard,—

'May Jesus Christ be praised.'

'For ever and ever,' answered the girl, and asked immediately, 'Mr Ragis, are you looking for Mark?'

'Naturally,' replied the newcomer.

Mark sprang from the bench and entered the courtyard. The guest had looked for him beside the girl, who was leaning on the hedge.

He was a rather thin man, with a wooden leg; he wore a grey soldier's coat and a faded cap of the same colour; his face was round, pink, and full of wrinkles and scars;

small grey moustachios bristled like needles beneath his nose, and his half-closed grey eyes shone merrily.

'Good evening, Rymko Ragis!' Mark greeted him from the threshold.

'I see you are back. They thought you had gone away like Kazimiez.'

'We were detained by a quarantine. Gral's ox died on the frontier.'

'I pity the lad. When did you return?'

'About two hours since.'

'I came at the right time. Let us be going.'

Having nodded to the girl, he turned and hobbled out of the gate. When he gained the road the young couple followed him slowly; and when he passed the crossing of the roads, where a crucifix stood, she stopped and began to ornament the figure of Christ with flowers, while the youth quickened his pace, overtook and walked with the cripple.

Leaving the road to the right, they took the path across the meadows in the direction of the oak grove. They were silent for a long while, as though they had separated but yesterday.

Yet three weeks had passed since Mark Certwan went to Prussia with oxen for sale, and he had only returned a couple of hours since.

The Zmudzian does not like to begin a conversation, he is not inquisitive; he looks, listens, and—is silent.

It seemed from afar as though trees in the oak grove stretched forth their branches towards them, casting a dark shadow across their path. The air was full of mysterious rustling.

From the meadow they entered a thicket of blackberry bushes, dwarf ash trees and wild roses; then large oaks surrounded them. They walked on soft moss and ferns. At length the old man said sadly,—

'Mark, I bring you bad news.'

The young man was not alarmed, he did not even raise his eyes, but, after a minute's reflection, asked in a quiet, muffled voice,—

'What news?'

'Your father is dying.'

At this also there was no outburst of feeling. Mark Certwan thought again for a while before saying another word.

'How long has he been ill?'

'A week. He returned from Poswicie; for three days he wrestled with the sickness, then it overpowered him and he went to bed. It's not an ordinary sickness — but that old bullet, which remained in his side, and which has at length reached the heart. He refused to see a physician, saying, "What use is medicine to an old soldier? When the time of muster roll comes he has to join his comrades—those who are there"—and he will go.'

Sincere, rough pity resounded in the old

man's voice. He rubbed his eyes with his sleeve, sighed, and after a while continued,—

'Every moment he asks for you, and towards evening to-day he wanted the priest to be called. The lawyer Jazwiglo from Kowno came as well. It seems he wishes to leave you his last will, and he is in a hurry. They wait for you, and the idea came into my mind to come after you to the Woynats. A misfortune is a misfortune, but those who remain have to live and think about themselves. I am afraid the step-mother and the other children will wrong you. They fear and dislike you. Remember, then, and for once in your life tell your father—when he asks you—what you want.'

He became silent and looked at his companion, but Mark's face was an enigma. It was doubtful whether he had even heard the good advice.

'What do you say?' inquired Ragis with a tone of impatience.

'We shall see,' was the short answer.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. It was useless to talk with such a man.

Again the rustling of the holy oaks was the only sound audible. A long while they walked over ferns, then the cripple spoke again,—

'I know what will happen—the same thing that always happens with you. The step-mother will do what she pleases. The estate

will dwindle away in Witold's hands, he and Hanka will also dwindle—and you—I know well who will go away and who will remain.'

'Do you know me also?' asked Mark, with emphasis.

'Yes, I know you,' affirmed the old man. 'Don't I know you?'

'It's doubtful,' rejoined Mark, shrugging his shoulders.

'Then listen: You would become a man if you had your own land, your own wife and your own brother. He who has not those things will fall down like a leaf in autumn, he will become covered with moss like a stone in the forest. Thus it will happen with you also.'

Mark must have heard this, because for the first time he raised his eyes, that were grey like the steel and quiet as the deep of bottomless ocean, to his companion's face.

'Why?' he asked.

'Because the estate of Skomont, where you have worked for the ten best years of your life, will not be yours, because Martha Woynat is not to be your wife and Lukas Gral is not your brother.'

'What had you that belonged to you?'

'I?' The old man became thoughtful. 'When I was as old as you are now I had a flag above me, a great idea in my head, and a wide world before me. I have left everything, and although I have only brought

home scars and a wooden leg, I would not exchange my life for yours.'

'Then Kazimiez was right to run away?'

'He was not right; but perhaps he did the best.'

'We shall see,' repeated Mark.

From the forest they turned into a large, cultivated field. At a distance from the shore of the river Dubissa stood a mansion, on which both looked; apparently both were moved by the same thought, for they hastened their pace.

They did not speak further. Mark opened the old gate, over which there was some sentence in Latin and a dark image of the Blessed Virgin,

Only one window in the house showed any light; it was wide open. As they came nearer they heard a voice reciting the Litany for the Dying, in which several sobbing voices joined.

Uncovering their heads they entered a dark corridor, guiding their steps by the murmur of the prayer.

The summer night was radiant with stars, and as the air, heavy with the sweet scent of roses, entered the sick-room, it seemed surprised at the light of wax candle that glimmered, crackling, on the table near the bed. It cast more smoke and moving shadows than light on the face of the dying man.

He was a thin and withered old man,

changed by his first and last sickness, yet despite his pain he was quiet and serene.

He lay on his back listening to the prayers and moving his lips from time to time; his eyes were half closed, yet they were still bright and full of intelligence; he looked at the wall, on which hung a gorget belonging to his forefathers, two swords, and among consecrated herbs a cross on a faded ribbon.

His hands, that were folded on his chest, clutched nervously at a chain hanging round his neck—perhaps a holy medallion.

As the priest continued reciting the prayers they were frequently disturbed by the cry of land-rails; the sick man raised his eyelids and looked on the persons surrounding him, as though vainly searching for someone. Then his eyeballs quivered, and a shiver disturbed the serenity of his face, while the hands pressed the chain still more closely.

'*Agnus Domini!* . . . ' recited the priest.

The sick man struck his chest thrice, turned on his side with difficulty and asked,—

'Has not Mark returned yet?'

'I am here,' answered a voice from the corner.

All looked in that direction, and a fair-haired giant, the eldest of the family, who bore a strong likeness to his father, approached the bed.

He stood opposite the sick man and awaited his order like a servant. His face

was thin, sharp, hard and dark like bronze; his eyes, from beneath his bushy eyebrows, looked gloomily at the quivering light of the wax candle; his thin lips were compressed in overwhelming grief.

The old man looked at him and asked,—

'Have you sold the oxen well?'

'A hundred crowns a-piece.' He put his hand into his pocket for the money, but the sick man shook his head and said,—

'Keep it! It's not our money. You will deposit it in the safe in Poswicie. It's the Orwids's money. I am glad you came back. I was afraid I shouldn't see you again, but God is merciful.'

He was silent, as though collecting his thoughts. Then he began slowly,—

'Our fathers never wrote their last wills, and they were right not to do so. An honest son will respect his father's word, and a dishonest son will break even a written will. Following old custom, I am going to leave you my last will with my lips. There is quite a tract of land and some money. That you may not complain that I have wronged you, you had better tell me, each of you, what you wish for. I shall decide. Speak, children.'

There was silence. Mark's eyes drooped, as was his custom, he pondered every word, and waited for the others to speak first.

'Children, I am in a hurry to finish—speak then,' repeated the sick man.

Then a very thin, young girl, about eighteen years of age, came near and seized his hand. She raised her black eyes, beautiful with great and noble thought, and whispered,—

'Father, may I ask also?'

'Yes, Hanka, you may. Speak boldly.'

'Father, I wish neither for land nor money, nothing—nothing but your word; tell them to let me study. I will give up everything to them for freedom and work, which I love.'

'Hanka!' exclaimed her mother.

The girl shivered, and gathering new courage, spoke warmer and warmer.

'I know, mother, it's not proper; you wish to keep me home and I can't stay here. Father, I promise you faithfully that I won't abuse that freedom; only give it to me, for if not . . .' she stopped.

'Finish,' said the old man.

'I couldn't live without studying, and you must not allow me to steal it as a hungry man steals bread.'

The old man laid his thin hand on the young girl's feverish head as though wishing to tranquillise her, but he did not answer, only looking on a youth he said,—

'Witold, now is your turn. Come nearer.'

From out the shadow a good-looking and elegantly-dressed lad, about twenty years of age, came forth timidly.

'Father, I don't know myself,' stammered he. 'Perhaps you will recover.'

'You are not a physician and I don't need any comforting. What do you wish for as your share?'

The boy looked at his mother, then on the priest, and, encouraged by friendly nodding, answered more boldly,—

'I would like to remain in Skomont with mother, if you would permit.'

'So?' muttered Certwan.

Then he said,—

'Your turn, Mark.'

It seemed that the giant had thought it all over, for he answered immediately,—

'Father, give me the mother's farm in Sandwile and the oak grove Dewajta.

'I was sure you would like to become independent and to marry,' said the father.

'I am old enough to do so,' answered his son, shortly.

The old man became gloomy, he made a grimace as though something ailed him, and waited a while for someone to speak.

'And you?' he asked, turning to his wife.

She began to sob.

'I don't need for anything if you are no longer with me. . . . A room in Skomont with Witold, until my death, will do for me. A widow does not care for anything beyond a grave.'

Again he was silent.

'You have all forgotten,' said he, sadly,

'that there is one more person—that you had three children.'

The kneeling woman arose and interrupted him passionately,—

'You forbade his name to be mentioned. You cursed him.'

'No,' said he, and his eyes glittered, 'although everyone who leaves the land should be accursed. He brought shame upon me, but he is my child. I have preserved for him that land which he has left, and I have not forgotten him. Perhaps he will return. Wait! And forgive him as I forgive when he returns.'

He was silent, once more collecting his thoughts and looking at the flame of the wax candle.

'Mark, give me the draughts of the estate,' said he.

His son left the room, and a minute later returned with the papers, which he unfolded on the bed. The sick man rose slightly, and pointing with his thin fingers to the papers, he said,—

'I inherited the estate Skomont, and according to the old custom of our family I give it to the youngest. A year from now, when he comes of age, Witold will have it; during that year the mother will administer it and will remain with him until her death.'

The boy looked again on his mother and asked quietly,—

'Then Mark will have nothing to do here?'

'If I said the mother I did not mean Mark. I have heard that you have debts—that's shame; I have heard you don't study—that's villainy; that you are living fast, squandering money and injuring your health—that's base. Should you continue in this course, God's blessing and my blessing will leave you. Remember!'

Witold's eyes drooped, he grew red and was silent, while the sick man pointed to the papers and said,—

'The other estate, Ejniki, will be for Kazimiez when he returns; I leave that also to my wife's care. He will find his own house and the land which he left preserved for him. Remember, don't wrong him—and give him my blessing, unless he would forget his religion and language. . . . Then . . . then. . . . Don't bless him.'

'God and his patron saint will preserve him,' rejoined the priest.

Again Certwan pointed with his fingers, and said to his wife,—

'Here is your dowry; the estate Budrajce is Hanka's share. She is different to other girls, but one must take her as she is, for one can't make a hoop from an oak—it would break—that's all. Watch her, but give her freedom in that which is honest; let her follow the road she has chosen and provide her with necessaries and comfort.

She wished to study, and study is not a sin.'

He made the sign of the cross on her forehead and said kindly,—

'Child, remember, preserve thy faith—Don't become too learned, but act with intelligence. Do you understand? So that I may not regret in my grave that I did as you wished.'

She clasped his hand and repeated with enthusiasm,—

'I won't, I won't!'

Mark, who was holding the draughts of the estate, looked quietly on as the patrimony disappeared piece by piece and nothing was left to him of all the land on which he had worked so hard for ten years.

'Mark, fold the paper. I have given away everything,' said the old man. 'You asked for your own piece of land and for independence. It's time for you to think about your own family. It's true they have all got what they wanted, and the same must be granted you. Indeed, you have more right to it, for you have worked.'

He closed his eyes and remained lying thoughtful and motionless. At last he made a violent movement and began to speak with animation, piercing his son with his looks.

'And who will replace me—who? I never was idle, I worked hard till you came of

age. The whole of my life I have been a servant, an overseer, and now, who will take my place?'

He became silent; Mark said nothing either, he only frowned and bit his lip; something in his soul was rebelling. The old man looked at him—he guessed the storm raging in his soul—and began to talk slowly and quietly as about some holy and secret thing.

'Many years have passed since the time when I was young. Some people say that now there are different people, different life, and a different world. It's not true, the world and the people are the same, only they become dull, like those old swords, from continual cutting. A notch is not shameful; but there must be no rust, for rust will eat the best steel, and the notch could be ground out if necessary.

'Formerly great storms raged over the world, and leaden clouds hung over it, and as the weather was dry people expected rain and dew from those clouds. But God's will was different. It didn't rain, it thundered and hailed on the people, and everything was over.

'Peter Orwid was like my own brother; he sent me to school for I couldn't afford it. Then we served together under the greatest general that ever lived.

'He was killed by my side, far from here.

I returned home alone and I found a pyre in Skomont, and in Poswicie—his orphan child.

'While he was dying I swore to him to be father to his child, servant to his widow-wife, and to take care of their estate. I have done as I promised.

'Thirty years have passed. The wounds healed, the grief diminished. I made a man of the boy. I married and rebuilt my house. Father,' said he to the priest, 'do you remember those times and Kazimiez Orwid? There are none left such as he was. I loved him more than my own child; he was about to be married, then came that awful storm, God's punishment, was our revolution, and as before, it was dangerous for him and others. So many tears, so much misery!

'He also went and did not return. I have only seen him once; he wept and made me swear that I would not forget him. His bride followed him. They left me their estate as a holy deposit for their orphans, and since that time, for so many years, there was no news from him.'

His voice grew weaker, and he finished in a whisper, with a touch of sadness.

'And I sha'n't see him any more, I sha'n't be able to return him that which I preserved for him with my labour. Perhaps There I shall meet him. . . . So many years!'—

He paused, completely exhausted, and closed his eyes.

Mark's head drooped, and all became sadly thoughtful, except Witold, who was gaping.

Mrs Certwan spoke first.

'If they were living they would have let you know,' she said, and seeing that her husband did not move she looked at him, frightened.

The sick man's chest was moving rapidly; she bent over him, arranged the pillows, and again approached the wine to his lips. He drank, but did not open his eyes; evidently he was suffering, for from time to time he made a grimace and frowned.

'According to the law, the time for prescription is over; it's necessary to advertise for successors, and if they do not turn up, then—'

The effect of these words were as though someone had struck Certwan. He shivered, the blood rushed to his face, and he looked threateningly at the man who spoke.

'Mr Jazwiglo, there is no prescription for the conscience. I don't need the tricks of the law—my law is here.' Saying this, he struck his chest. And according to it I have acted all my life. I have preserved the estate for many years, through hard times, for him or for his children, but not for strangers.'

The lawyer raised his eyebrows, caressed his bald head and closed his eyes once more.

'But suppose they don't return, or their children either, what then?'

'If they don't return,' repeated the sick man, slowly, 'then, ten years after my death, he who takes my place will divide the land between the people who worked on it:—the peasants of three estates—in equal parts; the capital, which I have accumulated, will be given in charity. But it will not happen thus; they will return, perhaps soon, you will see.'

He looked on the silent Mark and said,—

'Son, you will take your mother's farm and the oak grove Dewajta; you have deserved it, but you won't go to work on your own land or live under your own roof. You will go to Poswicie, there you will take the holy legacy when I am dead, and you will do as I have done; such is my command.'

The giant did not answer a word, and his father, evidently accustomed to his silence, did not ask whether he consented; then with trembling hands he took the chain from his neck, opened a little silk bag hanging on it, and took out a small key and half of an old ring, with a coat of arms engraved on it.

'This is the key of my desk, and this is a sign, a souvenir; the other half of the ring Kazimiez Orwid has taken with him. In the desk you will find a power of attorney made out in your name, and all possible indications. The rest Mr Jazwiglo will tell you, for I lack

time and strength. Mark, take it, and let me die in peace.'

The young man still stood as if rooted to the ground. His powerful, sunburnt hands, on which shone a gold ring, pressed the bed convulsively. He was very pale, and between his lips his set teeth were visible. One could see that his soul was full of grief and that he would weep if he spoke.

The step-mother made an impatient movement and said,—

'You will have to do it if your father wishes.'

But the old man looked at her severely and said,—

'Let him be. He who promises easily does not always keep his word, Mark, listen, I am in a hurry to finish; this is the last sorrow that weighs like a stone upon my soul. Take that burden from me, it will bring you good luck. Come!'

Mark approached slowly. The father hung the chain round Mark's neck, and, already calmed, spoke with louder voice.

'You must be faithful like a dog, watchful like a cock, and you must not allow anyone to take that which belongs to the Orwids; unless it be the person who brings the other half of the ring. Such was the agreement between us. Will you remember? I have sworn and you must fulfil it.'

He laid his hands on his head and added,—

'You don't speak much, and no one understands you; perhaps you are bad, then let my blessing change you; and if you are good, then let my blessing help you to realise your wishes. You are the oldest and most intelligent of them all, and they are afraid of you. Don't wrong them, and don't think about yourself. Your portion is in Poswicie, beyond the river. Remember—give me your word.'

For a while no word passed Mark's lips, then he murmured,—

'You have commanded, I will obey.'

The sick man sighed, as though freed, pressed his son's head to his breast, whilst a few tears dropped on the youth's fair hair.

'May God reward you,' whispered he, and then, as if impressed by someone invisible, he said, 'Mark, give the priest the casket.'

Mark handed the priest a quaint, large iron casket. Witold rose from the arm-chair and stood behind his mother and sister. The sick man took a key from under his pillow and spoke to the priest slowly.

'There you will find seven portions, five thousand roubles each. Five for four children and my wife, the sixth you will divide amongst my servants, and the seventh give to Ugian, to the church of Holy Virgin under whose protection I placed myself when I was young.'

The vicar counted and handed to each their portion of the legacy.

The mother took Kazimiez's part, the last portion was handed to Mark, who pushed the empty casket aside, thinking he would no longer fill it as he did before.

'That's all,' said he. 'I have finished, I have finished.'

He raised his hand to bless them.

'May God grant you a good lot, and peace and freedom, for that is the whole happiness in this world. Live a good life and you will prosper.'

They all knelt, he made the sign of the cross over their bent heads, and then fell back on the pillows. A while he remained motionless and very pale. Then, moved by the greatest solicitude, he looked on Mark standing opposite.

'Remember, you are the Orwids's servant. Remember—' he whispered.

'You have commanded, I will obey,' answered the giant.

In that moment Rymko Ragis stepped forth from the shadow, and leaning on his stick, stood beside Mark.

'Certwan, to whom will you give me?' said he, half ironically. 'You must give me to someone, otherwise they will fight for me.'

For the first time Mark's face became animated, and he said quickly, as though afraid that someone would prevent him,—

'Rymko Ragis, will you come with me?'

'It's right,' said the old man. 'Go with him, comrade, to his farm, and take care of it. And you, Witold, you shall keep Aunt Aneta until her death. Don't dismiss the old servants. An old servant is a friend.'

He wished to say something more, but could not; he closed his eyes, pressing his chest with his hands.

He was speechless, breathless and motionless while the pain seized him; then he moaned, and as though wishing to lessen his sufferings with a prayer, he whispered the psalm, stopping every little while—'*Judica me, Domine, et discerne causam meam.*'

The priest handed him the consecrated wax candle and began to recite a prayer with monotonous voice.

Witold returned to his arm-chair, the wife leaned on the bed, and the girl sat on the floor sobbing,

Only Mark stood motionless, with closed lips and a frown on his forehead, and looked on his father's face, which grew longer and more yellow; from his chest came painful breathing, in which a keen ear could distinguish—*Judica me, Domine, et discerne causam meam.* . . . There was a solemn silence in the room. . . . It was the agony, ante-chamber of eternity.

Through the window one could see the pale stars and feel the cool morning dew fall on the blossoming roses near the wall.

At length, when the cocks crew for the first time, Certwan opened his eyes wide and looked on the swords and sighed. The consecrated candle fell from his hand.

All rushed to him. The old man's eyes were open and full of tears; his features were remarkably serene.

'He died as he lived,' murmured Ragis, wiping his moustachios and eyelids.

'Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus!' cried the wife, striking her forehead against the bed.

'Joseph, bring a light,' was the first command of the young heir of Skomont. Mark moved aside and looked out through the window.

The day was breaking, the soft rays of the sun peeped into the room.

The birds in the branches were awakening, people, animals and insects were beginning their daily toil, but he, the old man, laborious as a bee, rising early as a lark, watchful as a cock, did not rise.

He had already finished his work—he was resting; for him it was a long holiday and a day of peace.

CHAPTER II

A WEEK after Certwan's death a strange procession passed through the street of Sandwile. Rymko Ragis marched first, a rifle on his shoulder and a hunting bag at his side, surrounded by half a dozen dogs of various kinds. He led by a string a tame fox, and from the pockets of his grey coat projected the mouths of motley rabbits. This travelling menagerie preceded a waggon, driven by a farm boy pitted with small-pox; the waggon was loaded with two boxes, a couple of chairs, some nets, bundles of tanned and untanned skins, a few hoes and pots, and on the top a gigantic cage containing a grey crane and several other birds of different kinds, who all chirped their loudest.

The waggon was followed by two meagre oxen, a thin cow and several calves, and after them walked Mark Certwan, leading by the bridle an old white mare.

The procession was closed by a grey dog who surveyed everything around him.

Despite the toil of the day and Zmudzian

indifference, every living soul was at the gate welcoming the newcomers kindly, and wondering greatly at what they saw.

'Is that all they gave Mark from Skomont?' they whispered among themselves.

They did not dare question him about it; he was looking as gloomy as night.

Old Woynat, standing at the gate of his farmhouse, shaded his eyes and looked, whilst Martha peeped from behind his shoulder.

'In the name of the Father and of the Son, what does this mean?' shouted old Woynat. 'Mark, come here.'

The young man shook his head,

'I will come later,' he answered.

By the side of Woynat's house, separated from it by a hedge, stood another, situated near the fields. It contrasted greatly with the former. Instead of a paling it was separated from the street by a few stones that formed but a bad shelter for a field planted with oats and buck-wheat. In the garden there were neither cherry-trees nor bee-hives, the barn was half in ruins, the windows of the house were without panes of glass, and the courtyard was overgrown with grass.

This was Mark's portion—his mother's farm. The procession entered the courtyard, and Ragis, to retain his countenance, began to whistle. Mark, aided by the farm boy, unloaded the waggon and put the cattle into the empty barn.

The astonished children watched them from the street; they were greatly interested with the starling in the cage, who cried,—

'Your health! Your health!'

'Shut up!' said Ragis, scolding him, to the great pleasure of the children.

'Grenis, you can return,' said Mark, at length, addressing the farm boy and putting a piece of money into his hand as a tip.

The peasant retreated as though someone had placed a hot coal in his hand, but instead of leaving he stood silent, holding a whip in his hand.

'What do you want?' asked Ragis.

'I shall remain here where my horses are,' he answered.

'The master told you to return, so go,' murmured Mark.

The Zmudzian looked around, on the road, the sky, the river, and on the barn half in ruins, then he approached the latter and lay down under its wall.

'He will return after thinking it over,' said Ragis. 'Meanwhile I will build my nest. My poor animals will be sick after such a long journey.

Mark thought for a while, hesitated, and went to the Woynats.

He entered. Martha was sewing at the window, the old man was walking round the room. They were silent on seeing him.

'So you have deigned to come at last,'

burst out Woynat. 'The whole week you hadn't time to let us know what happened there; well, tell us now!'

'Evidently I had no time to come. I have grown up among you, and become accustomed to you, but a father should have the first claim on his child's attention. A few days ago we buried him.'

'That I knew, for I was at the funeral. I am anxious to learn what you are going to do with yourself now.'

'I shall do as my father commanded,' answered he, gloomily.

'Then tell us—what is the meaning of this menagerie you have brought with you?'

'Well, I have taken what they gave me.'

'What do you mean? Is that all you received from Skomont? Has your father not left his last will?'

'Yes, he did. He divided the land.'

'And what did you receive?'

'The farm and Dewajta.'

'And what became of Skomont, Ejniki and the money?'

'Skomont belongs to Witold and mother, Ejniki to Kazimiez, and from the money each of us received five thousand roubles.'

'Why did you not ask for your share? They have sent you away like a beggar. That is mean!'

'I don't wish to quarrel. I shall not take

anything by force,' said Mark, shrugging his shoulders.

'You good-for-nothing!' growled the old man, then he became silent.

For a while he walked to and fro in the room and puffed, then he began to talk angrily.

'They are cheats, swindlers! They found a duffer and they have robbed him. They wronged him in order to vex me. Wait! We shall see who is the most shrewd. They drove him away and they laugh at old Woynat. Wait, I will show them! He shall be a lord and you beggars!'

He stopped in front of Mark, and looking proudly at his gigantic figure, said,—

'Your arms and my intelligence will work miracles. We will join our farms in one and work. I sha'n't die before you pay them all out and take the estate into your own hands. In the autumn you will marry Martha quietly, we will live together, and see how they will squander all they have. Do you understand? Don't accept your father's will and pay them slowly. Life is long and you will be able to wait till fortune comes to you!'

Mark was silent, he hung his head and listened. Yes, such was his dream:— Martha, work, and land, beloved land! Maybe grief and worry were whispering something about revenge, and the old man was fanning the flame. Mechanically, per-

haps to still temptation, the young man put his hand under his coat and pressed the little bag with the ring so violently that it caused him pain, and he could not speak a word for a long time.

'What did you say?' asked Woynat. 'Have I given you some courage? You are no longer afraid because your house is in ruins?'

Mark looked at Martha, and then said, through set teeth,—

'No matter if I am afraid or not, I shall only stay there until this evening.'

The old man turned pale, he was frightened.

'Why only until this evening?'

'Because my father commanded me to go to Poswicie. They are waiting for me there.'

This was a thunderbolt. The girl dropped her hands and grew pale. The old man could not breathe. He opened his mouth, stared, and was silent. They had forgotten old Certwan's friendship for Orwid, had forgotten that chain which had dragged upon his whole life—that madness as they used to call it. He had left it as a legacy to his son! But after a moment of ill-omened silence Woynat burst forth,—

'You! you! to Poswicie—to be a land overseer without pay? You! You—'

'I shall go,' said Mark, shortly.

'You will go? Why? To wait for dead

people as your father waited? Think it over.'

'Uncle, it's no use thinking it over. Father is in his grave and I gave him my word. I shall go!'

'And your land? and I? and Martha? Think about all that!'

'No use to think. Ragis will take care of the land, and as for you and Martha . . . God's will—'

'What do you mean?'

'Perhaps you will kindly wait for me. Perhaps the Orwids will return sooner than they are expected. How do I know? Father commanded, I must obey.'

The old man's anger changed into wrath, and slowly pronouncing word after word he said,—

'Then wait for them—with pleasure! Serve for a pension. But as for us, don't mix us up with your plans. Death hurries me on, and I have no right to waste my time, I have not strength for it. I need strong arms and help immediately. Either remain here to-day or go forever. . . .'

Mark shook his head.

'You know that I can't remain. . . . I must go!'

'With God!' muttered the old man, turning his back on him.

The young man raised his eyes, he looked for his bride, but the chair at the window was empty—the girl had slipped away un-

perceived. He bowed to his uncle and went out. Martha was not in the court-yard; he turned and looked round the garden, and was about to open the gate, when he heard a slight sobbing under the hedge.

He shivered, opened the thicket, and looked. The girl was sitting on the ground, she had covered her face with her apron and was crying.

He looked a while at this grief. 'Martha, don't cry,' he said softly, 'what's the use?' I wish to bid you good-bye.'

She sobbed piteously, red from crying and emotion.

'Don't listen to grandfather,' cried she, 'He doesn't care whether it be you or another. Let him search for strong arms to help him in the work, but not for a husband for me. Oh, God! you must go! How dreadful! But should you return either in a year, or in ten years, as long as I am alive I am yours. I will swear to you—if you wish it.'

'Better not, but keep your promise,' said he, gravely. 'God listens. I shall always be the same, you know that.'

'You shall see,' whispered she, 'that I am always the same. You or no one.'

They clasped each other by the hands, and would have remained thus for a long time, covered by the thicket, but for Ragis, who was talking to his animals.

Mark pressed the girl's hand and with-

drew. The branches took their ordinary positions, again dividing the two gardens with a green wall; there was no trace that a while ago they had been moved, only in the young hearts there was perhaps left a little bitter joy.

Ragis had not wasted any time; Mark did not recognise the room. The old man had dusted it, on the bare wall he had suspended the arms, hunting trophies and several bright pictures representing St Genevieve's life. The various things were placed here and there, while two camp-beds occupied two corners of the room.

The animals were inspecting the new place, whining and whimpering. Ragis was unpacking the boxes and preaching to his menagerie.

'Well, they have sent you away?' he asked Mark.

'Who?'

'The old man and the girl—'

'The old man is not one with the girl,' muttered Mark, opening a bag.

'Do you know that Grenis has run away to Skomont with the horses?'

'Has he?'

'I saw him through the window; he took them out, mounted and went away. I wanted to catch him, but then, I thought, they have taken so much they may take the horses also.'

'You did well. We shall find another groom and horses for money.'

He bent over the bag and was silent.

Ragis shook his head, sat on a bench and lighted a pipe.

'What I prophesied to you has happened,' he began sadly. 'Wrong! wrong! Was it any use for you to work so many years? What has come of it? As from a wrecked boat . . . a piece of plank. To all that you are going!'

Mark was obstinately silent. He was taking off his clothes slowly and hanging them against the walls. Evidently he wished to forget that he was only a guest there.

'What will not bad people do?' continued the old man. 'Certwan was a just and a hard man, but they put a saddle on him and led him as with a string. It must be better to be bad than to be good.'

'Don't say anything against my father,' answered Mark. 'He did as they wished. They thought it was bad for me, but it's good.'

'Why?' asked Rymko, inquisitively.

The young man stretched himself, and as usual thought what he should answer.

For a while he looked at the wall above his camp-bed.

There, under a holy image, hung a knight on horseback, made in cast-iron. On his shield was a double cross, and his right hand,

that was raised, held a sword. Mark looked at that knight and said slowly,—

'I did not work and suffer silently for myself.'

'For whom then? For the Woynats? Or for Witold?'

'For neither; for him,' muttered he, pointing to the knight.

Ragis's eyes brightened and he twisted his little moustachios, but still appeared as though he had not understood.

'In a year's time the Skomont estate will pass into other hands; Witold will eat the patrimony like a snipe, he is gluttonous and has sharp teeth. Kazimiez will not return, and should he, he will sell the estate of Ejniki. Hanka will droop with overstudy, and will lose the Budrajce estate. Everything will be lost!'

Mark raised his head, pushed his hair from his forehead, placed his hand on his breast, as though seized with a paroxysm of pain, and after thinking a while he said, in a loud voice and with a kind of savage energy,—

'You say it will be lost! Well, father, in that day of peril I and my Devaytis will be there.'

The cripple looked and listened. He had known the youth from childhood, for they had lived together, but he had never seen him as he was to-day. His gloomy voice

sounded like a war trumpet, the flashes from his dark eyes were like thunder-bolts.

The sun shone in the dark room, and one ray gilded the black knight; then for the first time Ragis noticed that his god-son's features were severe and obstinate as those of the iron knight, as though he were his father or brother, or as though they had been together on the battle-field.

An unusual reverence had taken hold of him, and he remained silent for a long time looking at them both, but could not decide which was the greater.

Mark's enthusiasm cooled, he was ashamed of his outburst and blushed. He looked down and began to examine his rifle. The ray died. . . .

'How will you be able to help them? You have neither the time nor the right to do so,' said the old soldier.

'Then they will come to me,' was the answer.

'They will come and ask for your signature authorising them to sell the estate, and you must do it.'

'I mustn't if I don't wish.'

'You are right! You have some common sense.'

The young man had finished his work and sat at the window; he pulled an old note-book from his pocket and began to count. Sometimes he raised his eyes and looked

sadly at the sun. It was sinking, and it reminded him that he must be going.

Both men began to talk of what they needed. They lacked everything, even bread. The buildings needed roofs, the land to be worked on, the garden a hedge, the house window-panes—in fact, all needed to be thoroughly repaired. After reckoning up expenses only half the capital was left—a paltry sum, which Mark placed in his pocket to have it ready to pay for Witold's fancies, and thus to take back from him the patrimonial estate.

Ragis gathered the money, smiling jokingly.

'Well, now I am a master here, I hope you will not look after me too much?'

'Perhaps I shall see you once every three months.'

'Very well, then. I will show you what I am able to do. You shall see!'

The young man nodded. Nothing could restore to him freedom and joy.

He bent and looked through the window on the white blossoming buckwheat and thin oats in the field.

He could already have gone to Poswicie, but he had postponed it. He was thinking that for a long time he would not be able to come and rest in his own house.

Ragis was walking round, making a noise with his wooden leg; he knew that it would

not be very proper to irritate the unhappy young man with complainings, and he let him be. No one came from the village to see them. Gral was not at home and Woynat was wrathful. The evening was coming; a couple of red, slant rays looked into Mark's eyes, and understanding that sign, he arose, threw his rifle over his shoulder and took his hat.

'I must be going. Good-bye!' said he to his god-father.

He pulled his hat over his eyes and went out into the courtyard.

'Margas—come!' he called to the grey dog.

'Wait, I will go with you to the river,' cried Ragis after him. 'What is that?' added he, looking down the street of the village.

Grenis was coming with the horses and turning into the courtyard.

'Where from?' asked Mark.

'From the pasture,' answered the groom.

'Then you did not go back to Skomont?'

'No; why should I go there? I was watching the horses for I had nothing else to do. To-morrow you will give me some work.'

'But you are engaged to serve in Skomont.'

'I was engaged for the horses. I have not taken good care of them that someone else should treat them badly. Will you give them some food?'

'I will, when I return,' answered Ragis. 'In the meantime, watch the house.'

'Yes, what else can I do?'

Ragis smiled with satisfaction and added,—

'An excellent servant!'

Mark looked in at the Woynats' window as he passed, but was silent. Among the cherry-trees Martha's red skirt flitted; he turned and looked after it once or twice, then quickened his pace. It was his last good-bye. They passed through the village and disappeared in the dusk. As a week ago, they were going towards the oak grove; but this time not in the direction of Skomont, but to the right, where the river flowed.

Rymko Ragis began to recite his evening prayers; the evening grew quieter. In that quietude Mark listened to something, raising his head often and stopping. Nearer and more distinctly the muffled, mysterious melody of the dark forest was encompassing them.

The young man listened, as we listen to the voice of a beloved person after long separation—as we listen to marvellous songs of great heroes.

Something attracted him towards the whispering of the trees—towards that dark thicket.

'Do you hear Devaytis rustling?' he asked the cripple softly.

'The idea!' said the old man, shrugging his shoulders. 'As if it were possible it could rustle differently to the other trees. It's not even the oak—but a water-mill on Dubissa that makes this noise.'

'It's Devaytis speaking on the glade. Listen!'

'Ah, you obstinate pagan! Are you not ashamed to call forth the Evil One by such a speech? Have you forgotten that you have been baptised, and that you can't worship a tree any longer?'

At this admonition Mark became silent. As they neared the grove, gigantic trees covered the sky before them, stretching out their arms as though to welcome the guests. The forest completely encompassed them.

Mark walked first and listened continually, as though distinguishing one voice amidst this rustling; as though called by someone, he advanced further and further.

Suddenly it brightened over their heads, a cloud passed, and in front of them appeared a large glade. The ground was rising—it was the remains of the old moat; on one side were the ruins of a half-destroyed tower, and before it, in the centre of the glade, stood a gigantic oak, protoplast of the grove, old like the Zmudzian gods, and it seemed that he welcomed the visitors with a long, muffled rustling.

Mark stopped.

'Why do you stop?' asked Ragis. 'It's already late, and the current of the river is swift. You may meet with some accident if you do not hasten.'

'Father, let us rest here a while, I will be going soon.'

'Well, let us sit down. Have you any tobacco?'

They lighted their pipes, and for a long while the grey smoke rose in thick clouds.

'It's bad,' began Ragis. 'Ten years will pass in vain; you will grow old, and that will be the end. You won't live to earn anything, and you will lose what you possess. And for what? The Orwids will not return.'

'Who knows?' muttered Mark.

'Everyone with any common sense knows it. From where should they come after so many years? An inheritance is like honey—a fly smells it through the wall. They have long been dead.'

'Maybe. But I must wait.'

'You are stupid!' said the old man, angrily. 'Through this waiting you will lose Skomont, Martha, health and youth. What object have you in life? For what have you worked since you were a lad? You have nothing—they have driven you away like a vagabond, and you don't wish even to complain.'

'I don't,' agreed Mark, rising. 'And what good would it be to complain?'

He paused a while, gazed at the boughs of the oak, and added an old Zmudzian saying:—

'Whether what should happen, happens or not, the Zmudzian will remain for ever.'

Ragis also rose and shook his head.

'A fugitive leaves footprints—the one who remains—blood-marks,' muttered he, gloomily.

After this exchange of proverbs they did not talk any more. They passed on the other side of the glade, and descended by a steep path to the edge of the river. The boat was attached to a trunk of an alder tree, and the boatman was slumbering within it.

'Good-bye, father!' said Mark, bending over the old man's hand. 'I thank you for all the good you have done me.'

'God be with you, my dear son,' whispered Ragis, softly.

The young man unfastened the boat without waking the boatman, and took an oar in his hand.

A moment later the river Dubissa had carried the small boat several yards from the shore. The old man leaned on his stick and followed it with his eyes.

The gigantic figure of the oarsman stood out prominently on the dark waters. He stood with uncovered head and looked above Rymko's head to the top of the trees in the oak grove.

He wished it a 'good-bye' with his thoughts and look.

Then his form grew smaller and smaller, then he became only a speck on the water, and finally disappeared in the dusk.

The cripple waited a few moments more, then he unslung his rifle and fired.

After a moment something shone on the other side of the river, and the barking of the dog was heard mingled with the splashing of the river. It was Margas, on the other side, in the park of Poswicie.

The banished man landed safely. Ragis sighed and turned homeward.

'God grant that he may return to his own house, for he is good and patient!' whispered he.

The oak grove rustled, but Ragis did not comprehend its rustling, and did not understand that the old oak on the glade answered him:—

'He will be back. Only wait. Everything passes. He will return!'

CHAPTER III

The oak grove situated in the fork formed by the rivers Dubissa and Eynia had belonged to the Certwans from unknown times.

In days of yore stood a temple there, protected by a castle. In the temple the goddess Aleksota was worshipped ; the castle was defended by ferocious warriors, clad in hides, with axes in their hands and fanaticism in their hearts.

To-day hardly any trace of moat or trenches remained, only a half-ruined tower covered with hops, a bottomless, dried-up well, a mound beneath which lay the warriors and legends. Of the church there remained on the glade only two stones, covered with some signs, and Devaytis.

Centuries had passed, the Knights of the Cross-apostles had perished, Perkun* had become silent, the holy fires were quenched, government and people had passed, wars followed wars, ruins covered ruins, laws and customs had changed — Devaytis alone remained.

* God, from Zmudzian mythology.

It stood in the centre of the glade, beside the holy stones; oak trees, its grandsons, surrounded it as with a crown; it was gigantic, still strong; it had a crown of green leaves; it stretched out its powerful branches like arms, like the heathenish Zmudzian archpriest Kriwe-Kriwejte, and it seemed as though it was calling for a fight with the elements, saying, 'Not you, people, planted me here, and not you, winds and storms, shall take me hence. God has placed me here, and I shall remain, remain.'

It overshadowed the glade, the stones, and ruins of the castle. Sometimes it listened quietly to the news brought it by the river; sometimes it whispered to the tower about old fights, and rustled majestically; then again, when some people visited it, a powerful breathing ran through the boughs. 'Welcome! welcome! The same earth has produced and reared us! With my roots I hold it in embrace; while you hold it with your arms and souls! Who shall be able to unroot us from it, who?

Only every autumn Devaytis remembered the heroes who had died, the fame that had passed away, the fire that was extinguished, and then, seized by grief, it rent its clothes and wept. Strangers used to say, 'The oak loses its leaves;' the Zmudzians said, 'Devaytis mourns old times.'

And for long months the giant stood gloomy, silent, and grieved so much that the goddess, whose stones it was watching, took pity on it and visited it.

She mounted the sacred stones, shook the boughs, caressed the branches and woke it up to life, and from her hands and white clothes there spread over the glade warm breath, bright rays, and the scent of flowers.

And Devaytis shook off its grief and lifted its head like a hero; the river and the old tower greeted it.

Such tales circulated from lip to lip in the villages and farms, such tales Mark's mother used to tell him when he had cast off swaddling clothes.

She was a simple woman, narrow-minded, a child born in the house of a petty nobleman, and she could not become accustomed to the position of a lady when she married Mark's father. The drawing-room was too large and too cold for her.

Her husband worked hard to become rich, he grew in riches and influence; she withered like a wild flower in a greenhouse.

She was quiet, timid, and afraid of the society into which she had entered; sometimes she wept bitterly, but secretly like the forest-bells in the thicket, for she was afraid of grieving her husband, whom she respected like a slave.

She was proud and sweet like an angel.

When she visited her brother in Sandwile she grew more joyful; she would remain there willingly, on the threshold of her father's house, with her son in her arms. The brilliant position, envied her by the people, did not tempt her, but she never said anything sad; she returned to Skomont singing to the child, and suffered the riches as it were God's punishment.

She had not received a good education, but she imparted to her son all the knowledge she possessed. Her religion was composed of warm faith and thousands of superstitions, Thus she taught him the Lord's Prayer, and many formulas against charm, enchantments and devil's tricks. Her history was a long series of legends about dragons and heroes, about Tartars and Swedes—she told him all she could remember. She rocked him with a Zmudzian song about Biruta and Kiejstut; when he was older she amused him with legends from the fabulous times of the country.

According to the custom of the village she used to spin during the winter evenings, and she wove variegated homespuns; in the garden she planted nasturtiums and marigolds; she willingly donned a glaring dress, and on Sundays, after the manner of the village women, she liked to chat in the churchyard, and would willingly return on foot, and not in a good carriage with her husband.

It was her great pleasure to go to pick mushrooms or berries alone with her child; she would sit in the dark forest, where no one would bother her with gossip, politics and fashion.

She used to sit on a stump, or on the moss, and listen to the rustling of the forest.

And the boy, with his flaxen hair and sad face, would sit beside her, listening attentively to her grave, mysterious talk.

From those times he acquired a heathenish worship for the oak on the glade.

His mother taught him that it was the fate of those who fell in defence of the castle to be enchanted by the goddess Aleksota into a tree, that for the glory of that fight they might live, as a souvenir, till the end of the world.

In the meantime Certwan grew richer and richer, Skomont became the first estate in the neighbourhood. Every day it became clearer and clearer to the modest woman that she was not fit to be the lady on such an estate, to be the wife of such an influential man; that she alone was a grey spot in his lot, that she was an obstacle, a dissonance! She felt thus, lived in seclusion, and grew thin and withered by thus tormenting herself, and at length, one night she died as quietly as she had lived.

Mark was then eight years old, and as the foundation of his character he possessed the

whole treasure of his mother's knowledge. The funeral was the end of his childhood—he returned home, visited all the corners of the house, and felt at once it was cold and strange.

The next day he escaped to the village to his uncle, and wanted to remain there. Woynat was glad to see him, but the same day Certwan came, and, after a sharp conversation with his brother-in-law, he took his son away. The boy was not a son, but a slave, as his mother had been.

And the years went on. To Skomont came a new mistress, new life and new order. She brought elegance, she gave Certwan three delicate children, and through her he became acquainted with good families.

Everything was changed. Mark's reminiscences were blotted out, his mother's image faded; only the oak on the glade did not change to him. It remained an enchanted hero, then a friend and confidant, finally the personification of a great thought.

Twenty years had passed since he became an orphan, a long time, that dragged slowly, heavily and laboriously, giving his soul a hard shape until it became altogether hardened.

There had been three golden moments in his life, and the oak tree was witness to one of them; it sheltered them with the protective shadow of its branches.

The first time it was when he came home from school to spend the holidays.

One beautiful summer morning he went to greet the oak, but he found that his solitary spot had been discovered and the chirping birds and crickets were frightened.

Two children were there. A college boy sat on the grass with a book on his knees, and in front of him, on a sacred stone, stood a girl dressed in white, with a wreath of daisies on her black-haired head. She was reciting an old poem in the Zmudzian language.

Mark knew them both. The vicar of Skomont had a brother who was a professor in Kowno; these were his children, who visited their uncle from time to time.

Both were absorbed by the poetry. He marked the measure with his hand and sometimes whispered the words; her pale cheeks became red from enthusiasm, and her black eyes brightened. They paid attention to the newcomer, who sat afar on the grass and listened.

At last the poetry was finished. The last verses she recited softer and softer. They told how the heroes were put on a funeral pile, which consumed both bodies and armour, and sank—sank—until it died.

'Julka, why did you lower your voice?' asked her brother when she stopped.

'Because they died and the fire faded' Such poetry is sad!'

'Not at all! Such a pyre of great warriors, it's not the end, and it's not sad. Those who remain take from it spark after spark, light new torches, and go and fight further. It's a watchword for other deeds, it's a brilliant example! You don't understand that yet for you are small, and a woman.'

'I understand it perfectly. Only let me take a spark and I shall go! But who would push through your crowd?'

She stopped and whispered,—

'Do you see, Olechno, someone is listening.'

The college boy turned and Mark rose from the ground. They greeted each other.

'You come for the holidays? We also. We came here to read a little. What a beautiful grove!'

They became fond of each other. From that time all three used to come under the oak.

Olechno was an enthusiast, he used to tell of heroic deeds and recite a great deal; Julka searched for birds' nests in the thicket, looked into foxes' burrows and entered into the crevices of the ruins; Mark listened and dreamed. They spent all the holidays under Devaytis, and this was never forgotten by the gloomy boy.

The next year he found mourning at the vicarage. Olechno had arrived first, and a week back was drowned whilst bathing in Dubissa. They did not find even his body;

the river had carried it to the river Niemen, and then to the sea.

Having learned that sad news, Mark ran away from the house and lay for a long time under the oak.

The moss of the forest must have seen that he shed his first tears of despair; then he sat on a stone throughout the whole night and thought. In his grief, full of imagination, he saw them burn Olechno on a pyre, which faded, faded, and he took one spark from it to light a torch, and went on new fights and further struggles.

After that night he was sick with fever for a couple of weeks; he was cured by his aunt's herbs and the young forces of his organism. He arose from his bed quite a different being; from that time he never laughed, never was angry, and, for a long while, avoided the grove.

At that time his father went to live in Poswicie, his brothers were yet children. In Skomont there was a lack of strong arms and cool and practical head; Mark was trusted with the administration of the estate.

And then afterwards, after several years of quarrelling with his step-mother and continual work, tired and in despair, he came, like a hunted animal, to Devaytis.

And it happened that Ragis came to the glade to take a marten caught in a snare. He looked at him and sat down beside him.

'Let us light our pipes!' said he.

'No, thank you. I don't smoke any more.'

'Ho, ho! And why?'

'That I may have a little peace.'

'Aha! Step-mother's nose can't endure bad tobacco, and your room is next to hers. What a pleasant neighbourhood! And you can't leave it, it's clear!'

'Where could I go?'

'To me if you liked. But you wouldn't care for that, you are too great a lord; you can't leave a palace.'

The young man was silent, looking at the ants on the grass.

'Birds of a feather should fly together! A bachelor with a bachelor! Don't be afraid of my animals. You shall see how I have trained them. Well, do you come to live with me?'

'Yes!'

'Then to begin with, go and fix my snares and let my wooden leg rest a while.'

From that moment he made an alliance with the cripple.

Some time before Rymko had sold a piece of land to Certwan, with a condition of an annuity in Skomont, and for a long time he lived in a room situated near the stable; he hunted, fished, and doctored the horses and cattle. He was independent only from fancy. He lived with his tamed animals and birds. He gave Mark half his room and the right

to listen to the preaching of the old soldier to his pupils.

In time they could not live without each other.

And a third time Mark was beneath the oak in great distress.

One day a letter came to him from his brother Kazimiez, who loved his step-brother, and although they knew each other very little he made an appeal to him. He had left a business college in Ryga, got a brilliant position, and he called to him every one who found it too hard and too burdensome to live at home.

Mark carried that letter for a long time, and, according to the wish of the writer, he did not reveal the secret to anyone. He decided to act as Kazimiez had, for it was hard and binding for him to live at home, and there was no prospect of any improvement.

Mark went to say good-bye to his old friend Devaytis.

The autumn was rainy and dirty. The oak looked on him sadly, and it seemed to the man that some human voices passed through the boughs and shivered on the leaves: 'Young man, why do you leave? What a pity! You leave me here and you think you will return. Better not return, for you won't find me any more. I live only through you! If you are not with me any wind will be able to overthrow me, any

shepherd will be able to set the fire and burn me!'

Golden and red leaves dropping from it like tears covered the ground and fell on the man standing beneath, who hung his head like a culprit and whispered timidly, 'I can't stand it any longer; I am not strong enough for such a fierce fight.'

And as in answer the old oak moved, the moaning stopped, and the branches rustled quite differently. 'You must gather your forces; everything is possible. Go and look on my roots; there, under the fertile earth, was a rock, and I have embraced it; I entered into it, I turned it into dust, and turned it into fertile land. Go! Look! Don't try to change God's will; don't go, for you will come to naught, as would become of me if they took me from here.'

Mark remained, and he was always ashamed of that moment of weakness, and it was his last. He answered the letter, asking Kazimiez to return, and from day to day his soul grew stronger; like the oak, it was crushing the rock and changing it into fertile land.

In the autumn after Certwan's death Mark was seen for the first time on this side of the river. At daybreak he came on foot to see Ragis; he mounted the old mare Bialka and went off in the direction of Skomont. The fields were already empty,

covered with a net of spiders' webs; the new ploughs were cutting the earth for the rye to be sown, and on a hill overlooking them sat a German—Witold's new land steward; he had a blue umbrella over him, smoked a pipe and was reading some book.

Mark stopped. He had not seen his beloved land for a long time. It seemed to him that the birds, and herbs, and every furrow cried to him, 'Welcome! where have you been, when I was bearing the fruits of your work? Why is a stranger here instead of you? Return to us!'

It was only an illusion, but he always heard something. He understood Nature better, perhaps, because he did not communicate much with people.

While he stood there thoughtful, someone greeted him suddenly.

'How do you do, Mr Certwan!'

He turned. A young woman approached the road from a side path; she was clad in a dark dress and had a large straw hat on her ebony-like hair.

Her face was sunburnt and her expression was sincere, thoughtful and slightly ironical; her features were sharp and delicate. She held a book.

'You didn't recognise me?' continued she, when he was slow with answer.

He dismounted and shook hands with her. On his cold features shone a gleam of joy.

'I should be justified if I had forgotten, for you did not visit your uncle, the vicar, for four years. How are you, Miss Julka?'

'Yes, it's a long time! I arrived from Paris a week ago. I have found many groves, and had I not met you I should have returned very sad. You bring to my memory the times when I was young and my brother Olechno.'

They both became silent at that recollection. After a while she continued,—

'Do you remember our vacations, the old oak, and the pyre from the ballad? I took a spark from it and went out into the world to fight. It was very hard, but now it's all over and the spark did not die. I preserved it, perhaps not so bright, but warm at any rate. And you?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'I have nothing to tell you. I am behind you.'

'Not at all! My uncle has told me all about you. I know the story and I respect you. Where are you going?'

'To Skomont; my step-mother asked me to come.'

'I am glad I met you, for I wished to ask you to come and see us on some business.'

He bowed to her silently.

'You know that Hanka and I are good friends. It's her affair. I don't in the least

understand why they are all so afraid of you. I am not afraid.'

'You have nothing on your conscience against me.'

'Have they? Even if it be so, I am sure Hanka has not.'

'Who is silent affirms.'

'That's true, but not being very loquacious yourself, you ought to be indulgent to those who are silent. But it's no use our disputing. Hanka lacks courage, that's the truth, and you must forgive and help her.'

'What does she lack?'

'Everything. How long is it since you saw her?'

'Since father's death.'

'What, three months? Then you will not recognise her, she is so changed. Notwithstanding her father's permission, her mother will not hear of her going to study. She has confiscated her money, administers the estate herself, and makes the girl work in the kitchen and cow-house. Being unable to do anything for herself, Hanka called on me to help her.'

'And what have you done?'

'I have gained my uncle to her side, and since I cured him of rheumatism he believes blindly in the usefulness of my studies in medicine. But his persuasions have done no good. Mrs Certwan will not give her permission.'

'Has she returned the money?' asked Mark, quietly.

'She hasn't.'

'Uhm. . . . She must have some reason,' murmured he.

'Why?'

'Because she must not have it.'

'Then what will happen?' exclaimed she, impatiently.

He shrugged his shoulders as was his wont.

'Where is Hanka?' he asked after a few moments' reflection.

'At home. Mr Certwan, I beg of you to help her; I know that if you want to do a thing you can.'

'I need Hanka's confidence. She must choose between me and them.'

'She has done so a long time since. She told me so!'

'I will have a talk with her,' said he.

'I thank you; and now, good-bye. When I saw you I thought you were slumbering, you were so motionless,' she added, smiling.

'I was looking at the German,' he explained.

'He looks very picturesque with his book.'

'I wonder what he is reading.'

'I can tell you, for it puzzled me also and I had some conversation with him. He reads Heine.'

They both shrugged their shoulders and Mark became gloomy.

'I won't keep you any longer. Good-bye. Come and see us.'

'Thank you; I will come in a couple of hours.'

They separated. He pressed his horse and quickly passed the land steward and his umbrella.

At every step he met with some changes. They had cut the fields in squares, like a checkered board, for rotation; they had cut down some old trees to open up a view; they had demolished the old gate and replaced it with a new one that was painted white and ornamented with a large coat of arms.

The old stable had also disappeared, and Ragis's house was in ruins. A crowd of workmen were building a new brick stable.

The first person Mark met was a thin, bent old woman, who was searching for something on the lawn.

Having perceived him she came swiftly to meet him.

He fastened the mare to a post and approached the old woman with uncovered head.

'Aunt, how is your health?' asked he, and wished to kiss her hand, but she withdrew it quickly, looking in a frightened manner at the windows.

'Thank you, Mark, thank you. And how are you? You live beyond the river and it seems to me that's as far away as Italy or Patagonia. No news. . . .'

'You were not curious.'

'Oh, yes, but what could I do? I can't go on foot to see you, and they wouldn't give me horses. I am an old woman now; I must keep quiet, for anyone can kick me like an old mushroom. I went once to your grove to gather herbs, the day of St Jacob. It's very far; I could hardly return. Perhaps you don't like me to go there? But you see there is no other place where I can get such lovely pimpernel, for there no one tramples it.'

She spoke quickly, as though afraid. Her eyes were red and full of tears; perhaps it was the result of old age, or sewing at night.

She had changed a great deal. Mark did not remember when she was young, but when his father was living she had moved about swiftly, she had busied herself in the garden with her bees, she had been a providence to the sick and poor, had not troubled anyone, and was ever ready to take someone's fault on herself if only Hanka and Witold might not be punished. She was a veritable treasury of household prescriptions; she could cook anything, and was ready to assist anyone in their work. Now she looked many years older and pressed down; despite her natural sweetness and delicacy she bore an expression of grief on her wrinkled face.

'Aunt, I see your eyes trouble you,' said Mark, compassionately.

'Well, old age! They fill with tears. I can't sew evenly. But I apply some herbs to them. It will pass. It's nothing!'

'You mustn't sew, then.'

'You know our saying—"The bread cries when it's eaten without being worked for." They mustn't cry over me!'

She tried to smile but only made a grimace, and bent down to pick up a stem. When she rose her eyes were even more red, and tears were rolling down her wrinkled cheeks.

Then an immense grief seized Mark. He had come with a mortal grievance towards all for the wrong done him by some of them, and for indifference of the others; but the sight of the tears of the old lady, his father's own sister, overcame even his hard nature.

'Aunt, perhaps you are not comfortable here?' asked he.

She shook her head, but he continued,—

'I know that you are always contented, but pray remember that there is a room for you in my house in Sandwile! It's not a palace, but it's a quiet burrow, which will always be ready for you. You know I don't know how to talk much, but don't cry, for my father would curse me from Heaven if I permitted such . . .'

'Don't say that!' she whispered through her tears. 'God bless you; you have taken Ragis and he doesn't weep! I am comfort-

able here. You brought your father to my memory, you look exactly like him, and grief seized me. They are all good! God grant them happiness!'

They were silent. The old woman looked round timidly and said,—

'You mustn't be angry if I tell you that I visited your house secretly. Old Downar was sick with typhoid fever and they sent a waggon for me. Ragis and Grenis were in the meadow, and it gave me courage to visit your house. How lovely it is there! If only you could get a garden and bees.'

Her face brightened, she looked hesitatingly on the giant.

'Did you not joke about the room? But perhaps Ragis will not be pleased, and to you too I should be only a burden. A couple of years of peace and I could be of some use, but then . . .'

'When do you wish me to send a van for you?' asked he, interrupting her.

'I don't know myself. My brother told me to remain in Skomont, but they don't need me there. If you like . . .'

'I shall order Grenis to come for you to-morrow. I thank you for the favour. I know you are a precious treasure.'

'Well, I will get you some bees, for they love me; for the herbs I give to sick people I will gather some flax; I will plant your

garden—that's all. If such is your good will and pleasure then take the old woman.'

'I thank you.'

The old woman wiped away her last tears and asked,—

'Have you seen Hanka?'

'Not yet, but I should like to have a chat with her before I see the step-mother.'

'Very well! God sent you here. For you see . . . But better not say anything. I will send her to you, only don't be severe with her, for, poor thing, she is very much afraid of you.'

'Has she any reason to be afraid of me?'

Miss Aneta Certwan trotted to the mansion, and he loosened the girth of the mare and waited.

After a while a pale young girl in mourning came from the yard. The nearer she approached her older brother the slower she walked. He advanced a few steps to meet her, encircled her waist with his arms with unusual cordiality on his part, and kissed her.

Only then she raised her lovely black eyes to his face and said sadly,—

'I know that you are angry with us—and you are right.'

'That is not the question. I don't accuse you and you mustn't defend yourself. We shall have plenty of time for that. I am in a hurry to be back, and I don't like talking. I met Miss Julka Nerpalis, and I know what

you want. Do you consent that I become your guardian?'

'I consent to everything. I will give you Budrajce and the money; do what you please with both, only assist me that I may be able to get away and study. I trust you.'

'Very well, I am going to see the mother, and should I be successful I shall go straight to the vicarage. Will you wait for me there?'

'I will! I thank you thousands of times!'

'Not yet. Where is mother?'

'On the verandah in the rear of the house. She knows you have come and is waiting for you.'

Since she had sent a messenger to her step-son, Mrs Certwan had been very uneasy. She was wondering whether he would come or not, what should she tell him, what his answer would be—she was building sonorous sentences; in reserve she had even a pardon and kind permission to return to her drawing-room.

Happily there were no visitors that day, and she was able to fancy quietly.

Hearing his step, she arose quickly and went to meet him.

As usual he wore a shabby coat, jack boots and had no gloves; despite this she welcomed him as a most agreeable visitor.

'Pray be seated! You are looking splendid. The neighbours can't find enough words of

praise to express their admiration for the order with which you administer Poswicie.'

'My whole merit is that I don't change anything from the way it was done by my father,' answered he, sitting down opposite her.

'But with us the harvest has been very bad, and we want ready money dreadfully.'

'Your expenses must have increased, then.'

'Certainly. The sickness of the deceased, the funeral expenses, Witold's travels, mourning! Then formerly, when all the estates were together, one could keep some residents, now it's difficult. And there are many of them—Mr Dyrgajtes, Mr Juchno, the blind housekeeper and Miss Aneta!'

'Aunt is going to-morrow to live in my house.'

'Is it possible? I am sure she has told you dreadful things about us. Witold likes to tease her; and I sometimes ask her to do some work.'

'She didn't tell me anything. I need a housekeeper, and I asked her.'

'A small profit,' said Mrs Certwan, making a grimace.

'Have you anything to order of me?'

'Nothing, my dear son. I wanted to talk with you, to ask your help in some matters. I have a very exalted idea of your intelligence.'

'Help is a difficult thing,' muttered he.

'Not with a family. There is an easy and useful way to help us . . .'

'Then I listen.'

'Ah, what a burden your father has left me!—I have to think about you all. He has left affairs very much entangled, the estate without capital, and some heavy debts . . .'

'What debts?' he asked abruptly.

'Witold's. He used to give him so little that he could not live properly in Ryga.'

'He used to get forty roubles a month.'

'It was not enough, for living is expensive there. I have talked it over with him and am convinced that he cannot study with less than a hundred roubles per month.'

'Study is expensive,' he remarked.

'We can't help that. I can't spoil his future for such a paltry consideration.'

'What is the amount of the debts?'

'Ah, a great deal! Thirty thousand roubles,' she whispered timidly.

'Have you paid it?' asked he, not showing any emotion.

'A part only. All my legacy has sunk. I have been left penniless. But those are only half means, and a speedy remedy is necessary. Witold must study, one must improve farming and live. Shortly speaking, I need, immediately, ten thousand roubles.'

She stopped and breathed deeply. She

looked at her listener; he was sitting bent as usual, looking at the ground. Such indifference, full of silent criticism, used to make her burst out, but now she felt that she needed him, as he represented to her the capital which he had at his disposal in Poswicie.

'I ask you for advice and help, you being the head of the family.' He raised his eyes.

'For help?' repeated he, with slight emphasis.

'Yes, my dear son! It's your sacred duty.'

He frowned.

'And what are the conditions of the loan?' asked he.

'Suppose we sell that tract of land near Sandwile. What do you think of it?'

'It's not worth ten thousand roubles—at the most, two thousand.'

'For God's sake! So little!'

'No one would give any more. Have you Witold's authority to act?'

'Yes, I have it. Dear boy, he believes that I would give my whole life for him!'

'When do you need the money?'

'Immediately, if it's possible.'

He thought for a while.

'I may let you have it to-morrow if you accept my conditions. You will make a deed in my name for that land and give a receipt for the payment made, and—'

'Naturally! naturally!' she assented.

'And being authorised by Hanka, I ask for the return of her money, and permission for her to go abroad. It was father's will!'

Mrs Certwan jumped on her chair. From pink and smiling she became purple and angry.

'What has that to do with the matter? Hanka is my daughter, and I have to take care of her and her affairs!' exclaimed she, with altered voice.

'As you like. I sha'n't give you any money otherwise!' said he, slowly.

'At such a price, everyone would buy the land.'

'Never without my consent.'

'We shall force you to consent to divide the inheritance,' cried she, more and more furiously.

'For that we must wait till Hanka comes of age. We have plenty of time.'

'There are means for obstinate people. You shall see.'

'I don't contradict you, but you will not have the money to-morrow.'

'I shall be able to borrow it from someone else.'

'Why not? There are plenty of usurers.'

'I shall not permit my daughter to become an adventuress!'

Anger was shaking her, she forgot to control herself.

'If you have spent her money I shall give mine. I shall take the estate of Budrajce into my administration and pay you five hundred roubles a year.'

She became quiet immediately and listened a while, not believing her own ears.

That man was a magician—he had read in her soul the principle reason for her refusal; he had a remedy for everything.

'I deserve those few roubles. I have given everything to the children!' She spoke quite differently.

'I understand. You give me Hanka's certificate of baptism, which is necessary to get a passport, and a receipt for her five thousand roubles. I shall be at the vicarage to-morrow with money for the land. The first instalment for Budrajce I can pay you now.'

He opened a portfolio and laid five hundred roubles in bank-notes on the table. This man understood how to do business; he knew people.

Half an hour later he was leaving and he had all the documents and receipts in his pocket.

He went straight to the vicarage after exchanging a few words with his aunt.

Both the young girls were sitting at the gate watching for his coming.

'I am sure you have conquered! I laid a wager with Hanka. Have I won it? said Olechno's sister to him.

'I have done what I could. They have assigned Hanka's money to me. Do you need the whole amount?'

'No! A couple of hundred roubles will do for my travelling expenses. Keep the rest. How happy I am!'

'I am sure you will get the passport for her and conduct us to the frontier. Will you?'

'With pleasure! I shall finish what I have begun.'

The pale girl clasped her hands as though in prayer, and, looking on him with eyes full of tears, she said heartily,—

'How good you are, how good! How shall I be able to repay you?'

'Anything will do, except your knowledge of medicine,' joked Julka.

He looked at her earnestly and seriously.

'You would repay me if you would not leave your country but would bring it knowledge, and work not for fame but with all your strength!' said he.

'Mark, I will return and will work! I thank you once more.'

'Will you not come in? We will tell you about our plans,' said Julka, joyfully.

He entered. The hungry mare was taken to the stable by the vicar's groom, an old servant served them a modest dinner. A couple of hours passed quickly before they decided to separate.

The young girls went on foot to Skomont. Mark turned to the village; he rode slowly, as a man who thinks or dreams.

He had taken the first step on the thorny path which he had chosen. They had come to him from Skomont earlier than he expected, and they knocked at his door oftener and oftener; they needed money, and he gave it. This was for him his first day of joy.

His head was crowded with plans, figures and dates. Sometimes those serious thoughts were mixed and entangled with a wave of young blood.

He had not seen Martha for three months. He had done it purposely, wishing to overcome the longing which sometimes seized him in Poswicie; he had not seen her this morning, but would do so now. They would shake hands through the cherry-tree thicket and would chat. He had time for some moments of pleasure. But he did not hasten. He waited till the evening; he went to see the land he had purchased, calculated what income it would bring, then crossing the field, he reached the pastures of the village.

Faithful Grenis was there already, eating a piece of bread and cheese and looking after the horses, grazing not far off. The groom took the mare from his master, murmuring and criticising his long ride.

Mark went across the garden to the house.

Dusk was coming on and it was cold, although the weather was beautiful. Autumn had already gilded the orchards a little, but the cherry-trees, although slightly frozen, still sheltered Woynat's house well.

From afar Mark heard a man's voice singing a sad song and sounds of a fiddle accompanying it softly.

Surprised, he stopped, and at that moment the song and accompaniment were interrupted, and instead, he heard Martha's voice,—

'Why does Mr Lukas always play such sad songs that one is inclined to cry?'

'Such is my fate, Miss Martha. No one cares for me, I have no one in this world! Sadness has pressed me since childhood. Such is God's will! People don't like me; I have no one in the house to talk with; and with everything I touch I fail to succeed. I sing sadly and it brings me some relief; I can complain at least to the winds.'

'Poor Mr Lukas!' sighed the girl, sadly.

Mark sprang aside hastily and entered his house.

There was a bright fire in the stove, and Ragis was cooking the supper and whistling through his teeth.

The animals greeted Mark joyfully, the cripple turned.

'For God's sake! Why are you so pale?

Have you met with a death or a ghost?' cried he, dropping a spoon from his hands.

Mark did not answer. Indeed, he looked frightful. He was white as a sheet, his lips were blue, and there was a wild light in his eyes.

'I am tired and cold,' said he at last, seating himself heavily.

'Drink a glass of whisky. Supper will soon be ready. Do you come from Skomont? What did they want?'

'Money.'

'Oho, ho! Naturally! Witold spends it. Have you given it?'

'I purchased Zwirble!'

'Drink another glass. You have common sense! Ho, ho, one can recognise immediately that I am your god-father. We will sow some rye there. We shall have plenty of bread. Supper is ready—here are some potatoes and bacon. Have you ever eaten such potatoes? Worm! don't look into the pot! Order, you scoundrel!'

But Mark did not eat. He drank one more glass of whisky, leaned with his elbows on the table, and was silent as the grave.

'Will you not have a bite?' said Ragis, sorrowfully. 'Ho, ho, they must give you dainties in Poswicie.'

'I am not hungry. I dined at the vicarage.'

'Did you? And did you see black Julka? A smart girl!'

Mark nodded, and asked suddenly,—

'What news at the Woynats?'

'I don't know any. The old man is choleric. He sticks to the man and bites like a fly in September. There are continual quarrels, for the girl is not silent either. They torture that milksop, Gral, from daybreak till night.'

'And what does he do there?' asked Mark, indifferently.

Ragis winked playfully.

There was no answer. The young man turned his face towards the window and looked into the dark night. The cripple cleared the table, fed his animals, lighted a small lamp and began to repair the old harness.

With a pair of spectacles on his nose he worked and chatted to his silent companion.

'What a trouble I had with the village people! Woynat excited the people against me, and they determined to drive me from here like a fox from the burrow. They put cattle in my corn, they beat Grenis so that he swelled like a barrel and got fever from the fright. Wait, thought I. I gathered them once in the inn and said, "Dear brothers, you must choose, either you will be good Christians, then I will be kind to you; or you will be like heathens, then I shall punish you. Choose!"'

Mark raised his head; this narrative interested him and stifled for a while the

voice that was gnashing in his ears, 'Poor Mr Lukas!'

'They began to laugh, and the young people to jeer. "Wait for news!" said I, and left them.

'They became thoughtful and a little bit humble, but I was not satisfied with that.

'The third day of the new moon I made a performance for them. I put on a black cloak, took a pot with coal, let loose every one of my animals, and looking neither to the left nor right, I went into the street, playing a flute.

'My animals know discipline like old soldiers. Hearing the music every one of them came out of the house; fox, crane, squirrel and rabbits all trotted after me. The hedge-hog was at the end like a prickly ball, and the starling sat on my head and cried, "Good-night! Good-night!"'

Ragis was so enthusiastic about this triumphant procession that he lost his spectacles and stopped working. His whole face was laughing.

'There was a great uproar. Every living soul came out to look at me; they laughed, they called me, then they became frightened; the women hid the children, the old men began to consult each other and sent after me those who were the boldest. I went quietly as far as Devayta, and there on the glade I began to perform some experiments.

'I swung my arms three times, I made a circle with my stick, I threw some leaves and herbs on the coal, and I spoke some language which no one could understand, for such a language doesn't exist. Then I put some acorns in the pot and returned home in the same way. The spies were trembling from fear, but they followed me. The houses were locked, and there was not one living soul to be found—they had all hidden under the feather beds or in the hay.

'Then I went from door to door, murmuring continually. I put a handful of acorns under every threshold, then I went to bed.'

'And what happened?' asked Mark, amused.

'A miracle, my dear son!'

Here the old man raised his hand and made a mysterious pause.

'Am I not a sorcerer? They all believed that I was one, for it happened that, in the meantime, calamities began to fall upon them. Felixe's cow bred a calf with five legs, a thunderbolt killed John Arminass's ox, and, lastly, old Downar died. It's true that he couldn't have lived, for he was a hundred years old and had typhoid fever, but he served me just the same. The people began to cry, the bolder women came to me, but I made them believe that I knew nothing and I shut the house

'They went to the vicar, asking him to

expel me from the church, but he drove them from the vicarage, and, a week later, they all paid me a visit, begged me for pardon, swore to be good to me so earnestly that I had pity on them. I ostentatiously gathered up the acorns, which no one had dared touch, swayed my arms again, broke the pot, and promised them my help and protection. Am I not a sorcerer?'

Ragis had accomplished his purpose and performed a true miracle, for Mark smiled.

It flattered him as the highest triumph of his wit.

'Oho, ho! What could I do with my wooden leg and the pains in my bones if I did not know how to charm? Now, when I need some help, I have only to shout in the street and the boys and girls rush with scythes and sickles. And as soon as Grenis hesitates to execute my orders, I take a pot from the shelf, and immediately he trembles and works as quick as he can. Oho, ho! And do you think that they don't come secretly to ask me for a love-potion?'

'Do you give it to them?'

The old rogue half closed his eyes.

'Alas! a love potion? How anxious you are to know about it. Perhaps you too would like to get one? But I sha'n't give it you, for it's not worth while. Spite on the nightmare.'

Mark made a movement.

'I am not of a very amorous disposition,' muttered he, and then added, after a while, 'I saw our field to-day, and I was surprised how well it's cultivated.'

'It's with charm, son, with charm. What? Well ploughed! Isn't it? Oho, ho! I know that you are already thinking to buy me a blue umbrella and a beautiful pipe for Christmas. Ho, ho! I am a rogue from the first rank to the right! It's time for me to think of getting married. The wedding shall be splendid, for we are already rich, only we lack a housekeeper.'

'Aunt Aneta is coming to-morrow. In the morning we must put the room in the rear in order.'

'Miss Aneta! To, to, to! Let me kiss you. It's a good match for me. You must have searched with a candle.'

He smiled jokingly and sang,—

'"This couple is well chosen and their house is quiet;
The husband is a cripple, and the wife a hunchback!"'

He stopped, and moving his head, said,—

'They slighted my boy and now their turn comes. Poor Miss Aneta! But I am glad she is coming. We will charm together. Well, if it's so, I will wait with my wedding a year or so.'

He worked assiduously, but could not be silent.

'Have you seen that imported horse

Witold has purchased? They are building a new stable; they are going to have race-horses. The German steals, the river has spoiled the water-mills and they are stopped, the guests do not leave the house. A true day of last judgment. Who is there?'

Grenis's dishevelled head appeared in the half-opened door. Respect for the pot and the sorcerer stopped him from coming nearer.

'Corporal, where do you order me to plough to-morrow?' asked he, closing his eyes and opening his mouth; it must have been to hear better.

'In Zwirble, you recruit!' commanded Ragis.

'I see you have got a title,' said Mark, when the door was closed.

'He must know subordination. Ho! ho! A corporal is somebody.'

He began to whistle, when Mark looked at him and said,—

'I will hire Mrs Janisewska's water-mills.'

'What for?'

'I will supply the army with flour.'

The old man thought a while and said,—

'And Poswicie?'

'I shall manage all,' answered Mark, quietly.

And, bending over the table, he began to calculate something.

'I shall earn three thousand roubles for Witold!' muttered he at length, rising.

The evening was over, the village was

sleeping. A few minutes later, in the last house the light was out; only the dogs barked and the autumn wind howled gloomily.

Towards midnight Ragis woke up and heard that Mark was not asleep.

'Are you still thinking about those mills?' asked he, half asleep.

'Yes,' muttered the other.

And the old man fell asleep again, but Mark could not sleep at all. The dogs barked and the wind howled; he was not thinking of the mills, but he could not get rid of that dreadful sound, 'Poor Mr Lukas.' It tormented him like a nightmare.

Hardly had the day become grey when he sprang from his bed and went quietly into the courtyard.

Hoar frost covered the earth, trees and roofs—it was quite cold.

Grenis, reciting his prayers, was already busy in the stable, and in the street a man was sitting on a stone, his back turned to the house.

'Grenis, hitch the horses to the van and go to Skomont immediately. There you will tell Miss Aneta that you are at her disposal. Do you understand?'

'I understand,' answered the servant, drilled by Ragis, and he turned to the right so unfortunately that he stumbled and fell.

Mark paid no attention to that, for at the same time the man seated on the stone had risen and come nearer.

It was Lukas Gral.

'You returned unexpectedly,' said he, having greeted Mark. 'I have long wished to go to Poswicie to see you, but I had not time.'

They stood opposite each other. One quiet, cool, implacable, looked scornfully on the other, who was embarrassed, plucked the edge of his coat, grunted and could hardly speak.

'You wish to tell me something?' said Mark.

'Yes.'

'Speak then.'

'Have you any objection to my serving with the Woynats?'

'What do you mean? Have you become their farm-boy?' Gral blushed, he felt the sting.

'Thank God I have enough bread of my own.'

'Then why do you serve them?'

The man cracked his fingers, dropped his eyes, and stammering, said,—

'Woynat ha—a—s promised me Martha.'

'That's a good reason for serving them. And did she promise also?'

'She is afraid of you,' whispered Gral.

'She is? But she has no need to fear. It's nonsense. She is not afraid of me, but you are an honest man. I am glad you came to see me, for yesterday I thought you were a thief.'

'Did you overhear us?' said Gral, blushing. Mark nodded.

'I love her so much,' complained the sad youth; 'but if you would say only one word, I would go away beyond rivers and mountains. From a lad I have carried that love in my heart.'

Mark was silent. Perhaps he also had loved as long and as deeply, but he could neither express it nor complain.

He passed his hand across his forehead and bit his lips.

'You are not angry with me? Do you permit?' asked Gral, beseechingly.

'Lukas, you are an honest man. Go, and God be with you!' murmured the giant.

The window of the house opened, and Ragis's smiling face appeared.

He put aside a cage containing his birds, looked on both men and sang:—

> 'There rushes a young girl, young girl,
> Loose the grey-hounds from the leash
> So that they may catch the girl,
> Do it comrade, quickly, quickly.'

The village was already astir. Gral extended his arm to his rival, shook hands with him and went out bent and humble.

When Mark turned no one could have guessed that a moment ago he had lost the only thing that was his personal and exclusive property.

CHAPTER IV

THE winter was very mild. It snowed and rained by turns, and there was plenty of mud, but the rivers were not frozen at Christmas. The river Dubissa was swollen, and, happily for Mark, the mills were going, bringing him the money he so much desired.

No one had seen him on this side of the river. The administration of the Poswicie estate, three whisky distilleries, and supplying the army with flour—all this had taken his time.

And then, why should he come? At the Woynats they were preparing for the wedding; they only waited for the end of Advent. Ragis and Aunt Aneta worked like ants and there was no one in Skomont.

Twice his step-mother, pressed for money, had accomplished the journey to Canossa —Poswicie; every time she was smiling and sweet. She took the money, gave receipts for it and departed as quickly as she could. Towards Christmas she was longing for Witold, who was in no hurry to return home, and she went to Ryga, not caring in the least how the German land-steward would employ his time.

Mark had nothing on this side of the Dubissa; neither Martha, work, nor friends. The people had almost forgotten him. Devaytis stood sad and silent, covered with hoar-frost; the earth was resting beneath the snow.

There were many neighbours round Poswicie, and one and another visited Mark from time to time. They invited him to hunting parties, and tried to draw him into society.

He visited them very seldom, only when it was absolutely necessary, preferring a chat with the older men; he avoided merry gatherings, giving as an excuse that he was in mourning. He did not like talking, and he could not make merry with young men.

When not busy he usually mounted his horse and went to Jurgisk, where blind old Mrs Janisewska was ending her sad life.

A young grand-daughter took care of her, and Mark's father used to administer her farm. When he died the old lady asked Mark to come, handed him the keys and books, and intrusted him with everything as she had his father.

It was a very meagre farm—some of the fields were sandy, others were low-lying pastures; three water-mills furnished bread for the two women.

Little by little, not knowing himself how it happened, Mark became accustomed to

spend the long autumn evenings in their tiny drawing-room, to read aloud papers and books, to listen to the narratives of past times and to sad melodies played by the grand-daughter on an old piano. The old clock ticked, the fire burned in the fireplace —he was comfortable and quiet there. The girl was not in very good health, the grandmother a little deaf and distrustful of people. Poverty looked out from every corner, therefore no one visited them except him, and him alone they welcomed with sad joy.

He used to bring them money and news, and every time he brought fresh air with him.

When he departed, late at night, Mrs Janisewska sighed sadly; Jadwisia became thoughtful and listened to the rustling of the wind.

In the meantime there was no news whatever of the Orwids. Old Jazwiglo had advertised in many papers; Hanka, by Mark's desire, did the same in Paris; he himself had written to Kazimiez, asking him to try to find out something in the East—everything had been in vain. No one came to the remote corners of Zmudz to take the golden fleece.

Time dragged slowly for the administrator of these riches without an owner. Sometimes, when he looked on the full barns and granaries, on the herds of cattle, and the money flowing like a stream to the safe, he was in despair. For whom was all that?

Then again, when he looked on the uninhabited *château*, full of costly furniture, ready at any moment for those who perhaps no longer existed, he smiled bitterly.

And when, tired, hungry and cold, he returned to his room, after inspecting the seven farms, he felt almost mad. And he asked himself for the hundredth time, 'For whom was all that?'

What matter one thousand more or less to those dead people?

Why should he wait nine years longer, without any result, and why should he torture himself?

Then he usually went to Sandwile to rest in his own house.

And he went, taking the road leading to the ferry near Jurgisk.

On the road he thought of his father, of that half of the ring, and the half-erased inscription,—

'*Judica me, Deus, et discerne causam meam.*'

But he never reached the ferry, and a while later he was sitting opposite blind Mrs Janisewska, listening, musing, and repeating to himself, 'Judge me, Lord, and look into my cause.'

The fire burned, the music sounded, and through the dusk there looked on him, from the piano, the sad, but at the same time beseeching and fearless, eyes of the pale girl.

He did not see them, he paid no attention

to them, but people began to whisper, and one evening Ragis came to Poswicie. It was just before Christmas Eve.

'My son, you are a bad boy!' cried he on the threshold. 'You have forgotten us! What? Ho, ho! It's too bad! I did not teach you such things.'

'I have no time,' answered Mark, after shaking hands with his guest.

'Don't lie, for it's not becoming to you. And then you can't conceal the truth from a sorcerer! Well, I will tell you why you don't come to Sandwile! You are ashamed of me.'

'Of you? Why?

'Because you have stolen something from me.'

'I?'

'Aha! Of course. And I have come to take it back.'

'There are many things in my possession that don't belong to me, but nothing of yours.'

'Yes, you have. You stole the love potion from me that was standing in a little bottle on the shelf,' said the old man, threatening him with a finger. 'Can you deny it?'

The young man shook his head.

'If I ever had it, then I left it in Sandwile. I don't need it now.'

'Aha! Is that so? You have no time to come and see us, but you have time to visit Jurgisk! Ho! ho!'

'But I haven't given Mrs Janisewska the love potion to drink.'

Ragis half closed his eyes and wrung his hands.

'Oh, oh, oh! Did you ever see such a fellow? He bothers me with Mrs Janisewska! Don't you know that Miss Aneta can tell fortunes from the cards? She told me yesterday—A wedding awaits Mark, after somebody's death; he thinks of a dark-haired girl. Aha! Now you blush! Only now you learn that everyone prattles about you, while you are deaf and blind. You think you are a partridge, that hides its head for safety's sake.'

The fact was that Mark really blushed, and was silent for a while, thinking. Then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

'The human tongue is a wind-mill for chaff,' murmured he.

'But I dislike to see you amidst the chaff. Well, tell me frankly, do you love Miss Janisewska? Do you think of marrying her?'

Mark hung his head and said, with muffled voice,—

'I loved one girl and wanted to marry her. I don't wish for another. Aunt would do better for telling whether the Orwids will return—that's all I care about now. Nothing more.'

'It's bad! I am ashamed of you, for,

firstly, you had bad taste; secondly, you are a little bit stupid to regret that trash. Then it's true that I sha'n't be able to dance at your wedding, and that you won't show your nose in our home.'

'I will come to-morrow.'

'Better come to-day, under my escort. For to-morrow you may stick round the ferry and never reach our house. I know it by myself. A bachelor understands a bachelor.'

Yes. People were talking a great deal about them. Mark thought the matter over, and did not visit the solitary women for a whole week.

For the traditional Christmas Eve supper Miss Aneta had prepared him a large pike with saffron. He had promised to come.

Towards evening he went in his sleigh, the first time that season, and he urged the horse to the turning of the road to Jurgisk. His conscience reproached him for passing by those poor women, deserted by everyone.

Suddenly a groom on horseback galloped along the road and stopped him, speaking with difficulty, for he was out of breath.

'The lady begs you to come for a minute.'

Mark turned without a word.

As usual the grandmother and granddaughter were alone.

They greeted him with an excuse.

'You were going to see your people. We wanted to wish you a merry Christmas.'

He kissed the old lady's hand—she blessed him. He bowed to the granddaughter—her eyes were full of tears.

'We have no one' said Mrs Janisewska. 'You are our only friend. That's why we were importunate. Are you going to have your supper at Poswicie?'

'If you will permit me I will remain with you,' answered he in his short way.

And he remained. He forgot Ragis and the pike and people's gossip. Under a rough exterior he had a gold heart. Towards midnight, when he was listening to a Christmas carol sung by Miss Jadwisia, a servant appeared on the threshold.

'A man come for you from Poswicie, sir,' said she.

He took leave and went out. A groom was waiting in the hall.

'What has happened?'

'I don't know, sir. Someone arrived by post and ordered me to go immediately and tell you to come home.'

'Orwid!' It shone in Mark's head like a star of salvation. He did not remember that his heart had ever throbbed so much as now.

He took the messenger into the sleigh, and—what a miracle!—he talked to him.

'Have you seen him?'

'Yes, sir. Everyone has seen him. He is young, thin, small, and has a beard. He must be a Russian merchant. He is dressed in some kind of skirt reaching to his knees, and he spoke Russian with Mr Sawgard.'

'Orwid!' The name resounded still more joyfully in Mark's soul. He urged the horses forward. He was flying as to a sweetheart.

Entering the courtyard he looked into the windows of the *château.* They were dark, only his rooms were lighted.

'Why did you not show the lord into the *château?*' asked he, indignantly.

'I don't know,' answered the groom.

They stopped in front of the verandah. Mark sprang out quickly and opened the door.

The guest was standing at the table, on which simmered a samovar (an apparatus for making tea); he rolled a cigarette and whistled without restraint.

'My soul, and where is your manager?' asked he, without turning.

'Kazimiez!' cried Mark.

The young man threw down the cigarette, rushed to him, seized him in his arms and began to kiss him.

'How do you do, my dear brother? How do you do?' cried he, his eyes full of tears. 'I have come at last. What? How did you recognise me? Ha! I have grown up, haven't I?'

Mark looked at his step-brother more attentively.

It was true that he had grown up, but how changed he was. From a good-looking boy he had become a thin, pale, and already slightly bald man, whose eyes were as of glass. One could smell about him some perfume mingled with the sweet smoke of tobacco. It was the atmosphere of a club gambling-house.

'I recognised the voice,' said the elder brother, keeping his remarks to himself. 'Perhaps you are hungry—tired? Where did you come from?'

'From Ryga, dear brother. That rogue Witold has a beautiful mistress. Since last summer I intended coming to see you immediately after I had your letter, but business prevented me from doing so. I couldn't.'

'I am glad you have come at last. Be seated, pray. Have you not heard about the Orwids?'

'Not a word. I inquired, but all in vain.'

A gardener, who was also Mark's servant, brought in supper. They sat at the table. The guest asked for whisky and drank glass after glass, prattling continually. His host listened and grew more and more gloomy.

He recollected that autumn evening when, having received Kazimiez's letter, he went to Devayta. The rustling in the oak did well in warning him not to leave.

'My journey was a true epic,' said Kazimiez, intoxicating himself with his own words. 'I was a whole week taking leave of my friends. Sunday I was invited by the councillor; on Monday the procurator gave a supper; on Tuesday I dined with the merchant Kabanoff; on Wednesday the Reverend Father Nikanor invited me; on Thursday I went to see my friend the widow Pelagia Rokoff; on Friday I gave my friends a supper at the railway station. No one was sober; the champagne flew like water; we drank all the vodka that was in the buffet. I paid six hundred roubles, which I won playing cards, and went away crying. Oh, dear brother, it was difficult for me to part from those good people! I slept quietly as far as the station of Kolymny, when I looked through the window, and what did I perceive? —a hundred gipsies, both men and women. Someone had told them that I was coming and they came to welcome me and to sing and play for me. Have you ever heard the gipsy song? How marvellously they sing! My soul! There is nothing more beautiful in God's world. They carried me out in their arms and kept me three days. I never feasted so well. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Have you seen your mother yet?' asked Mark, indifferent about such successes.

'Yes, I did. You wrote that father—God grant him eternal rest—had left me also

an estate and some money. Well, where are they?'

'Mother keeps the money and administers the estate.'

'But she told me you had everything.'

'Then she didn't tell the truth, for I don't know anything about it. Father left you five thousand roubles, Ejniki and his blessing should you return. He told me to administer Poswicie and not to meddle with your affairs.'

'It's too bad, dear brother, for you alone have a solid head. They will cheat me,' said Kazimiez, sorrowfully.

For consolation he drank a glass of whisky.

'Well,' continued he, with more animation, 'suppose they do not give me anything, it won't hurt me. I sha'n't mourn. I have one thousand roubles as salary. I can live. I could be richer if I would, for I could marry. By the way, have I not called you from your girl?'

Mark shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Kazimiez did not ask any more; he grew sleepy, he could scarcely move his tongue, he winked his eyes and took a more comfortable position in the arm-chair, and at length began to snore. His host told the gardener to take care of him and went on to the verandah. The air of the room oppressed his chest. He stood for an hour, indifferent

to the cold. His thoughts were far away, near his father's grave. How happy he was that he had died and had not seen his son.

The next day every living soul went to church.

The guest slept, then ate his dinner and slept again.

Mark ordered a horse to be hitched to the small sleigh and went to Sandwile. For the first time in his life he felt the necessity of sharing his new sorrow with someone. It was already dusk when he drove into the street.

All the windows were lighted, everywhere was heard the sound of fiddles and tambourines; groups of boys in costumes were going from house to house to sing Christmas carols. At the Woynats they were dancing; a crowd surrounded the house. Mark's house alone was quiet and almost dark.

The great sorcerer and Miss Aneta were playing cards by the light from the fire. They must have been economising candles.

Mark entered, greeted by the howling and screaming of the menagerie.

'Mark!' exclaimed his aunt, joyfully, 'what an agreeable surprise!'

'Aha! surprise!' said Ragis. 'Why did we not have this agreeable surprise yesterday? I should not have eaten the whole of the pike, and I should not have

been sick to-day. Naturally our lord preferred the company of a young girl and forgot about God's world . . .'

'Don't disconcert him,' said Miss Aneta. 'Thank God he finds something that gives him pleasure! Sit at the fireplace, my dearest. Warm yourself. Don't be sorrowful. I will give you something to eat immediately.'

Smiling, and dressed in a sheep-skin jacket, the good-hearted old woman looked ten years younger. Peace and good understanding had smoothed the wrinkles made by former grief. She moved around as in her good times, while Ragis muttered,—

'Miss Aneta is always satisfied. She would receive a murderer hospitably. It makes me really angry. The boy will be altogether spoiled by such caresses. Ho! ho! ho! I am quite different. A soldier in the ranks—very well. But for a deserter —a bullet through the head. It's understood.'

'Mark, don't listen,' said the brave woman, bringing to the table everything she had to eat.

Her encouragement was needless. Mark knew Ragis well; he permitted him to empty his budget.

He sat by the fire and warmed his cold hands without saying a word. From the street could be heard the singing of Christmas carols, then the music and dancing at the Woynats.

At that moment the door opened and Grenis's frightened face appeared. According to orders he closed his eyes.

'Corporal! a misfortune,' moaned he.

'Report shortly and clearly,' cried Ragis, rising.

'A strange horse is in our stable Perhaps the Evil One has put it there,' stuttered the farm boy.

'You goose!' shouted the corporal in his ear, and being unable to refrain from a laugh he burst out so loudly that the boy opened his eyes, looked confounded, and ran out as quickly as he could.

'What an honest boy!' said Miss Aneta.

'Honest!' exclaimed the cripple, indignantly. 'Better say stupid. But who could convince you? That's the result of your deserting us. They take you for an evil spirit. You have deserved it.'

'I couldn't come yesterday,' said Mark.

'Why?'

'Because Kazimiez arrived.'

The old couple were dumb from surprise and joy. Only after a while there were some exclamations.

'He came,' continued Mark, 'for his money and property, but he is so changed that I could hardly recognise him.'

'Why did you not bring him with you?' both asked together.

'He was sleeping. He drank too much.

And then you could not understand what he said.'

They were all silent, with that oppressive silence that covers indignation, pain and often tears. The food was untouched, no one remembered the fire.

'Poor child!' whispered the old woman, and added something indistinctly, perhaps a prayer.

Ragis leaned his chin on his breast, and biting his moustache said, after a pause,—

'Is he going to remain here or return?'

'God knows!' murmured Mark.

Miss Aneta clasped her hands and turned to the image of the Holy Virgin of Ostrobrama. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

'Holy Virgin, speak to him in his own tongue. Bring him to his senses that he may not leave us. You can perform miracles.'

The old soldier rose and walked to and fro in the room, making a noise with his wooden leg.

'Don't let him go, that's all,' decided he in his military way.

Then he stopped in front of Miss Aneta and said,—

'You screamed "Don't listen! don't listen!" But I was right. For desertion a bullet through the head. But who could convince you? You would receive even him hospitably.'

'How can I help pitying him, poor thing! now he is like a sick man?' Thus she justified herself.

'Pshaw!' said the old man. 'You should have been born a chaplain for criminals. Naturally you would absolve them all. Mark, what will you do with him?' asked he.

'We shall see,' answered the Zmudzian in his usual way.

'Let us marry him as soon as possible,' advised Ragis. 'What a pity black Julka is not here, she would be a match for him.'

'Mark, don't let him go,' whispered Miss Aneta; 'perhaps he will forget. And don't be too sorrowful. God sends sorrow; He will also give consolation.'

Her hand, hardened by work, was laid gently on his bent head, and he took that hand and pressed it to his lips.

'There is no consolation for me,' said he, after a while. 'The Orwids do not come.'

'They will come,' said she, with energy; 'they will come soon.'

He raised his head and the light of animation and interest shone in his eyes.

'Who told you so?' he asked.

'I have seen them in a dream. They were not far away and they were walking swiftly. You will see that before a year is over you will be free.'

'A dream is a nightmare,' laughed Ragis. 'Better come to the stable. By the light of

the lantern I will show you what a fine calf we've got for Christmas. The mare has given us also a surprise. Come!'

This helped to chase away their gloomy thoughts.

The old man must have been a sorcerer. In every corner was order and abundance. Miss Aneta had made the house clean; there were plenty of provisions in the pantry and corn in the barn; the cattle were looking well, and Grenis's horses were snorting joyfully over a crib full of oats.

His aunt's prediction, and the sight of the farm so changed, filled Mark's soul with some confidence. During that year he had paid his step-mother and Witold quite a large sum of money, and purchased a piece of land; he did not regret the money he had spent, for money was to him only a powerful means, not the aim. They called him a miser and cunning, but he was only persevering and reserved. From childhood he had had one idea, one desire—to retain the land. He had not swerved for one minute from the road once selected.

Meanwhile Kazimiez was at Poswicie. He slept and drank much, sometimes he read the newspapers, told of his triumphs, or asked his brother,—

'My soul, how will it be with my affairs?' That was the name he gave his father's legacy.

'We must wait until mother returns from Ryga,' answered Mark.

After Epiphany came the news that Mrs Certwan had returned. Witold had returned also; he was sick and had given up his studies for this year.

Kazimiez asked for a sleigh, and went to Skomont dressed in a large sheep-skin coat folded round his hips, and for this reason called by the peasants a skirt. All the servants watched his departure, making different comments, and laughing quietly at his big felt boots and enormous cap that looked like a stork's nest.

The old land-steward, Sawgard, was spitting and pulling his moustache.

'Our old man'—so he called Mark—'would not be afraid of the devil himself if he can look on that bogy-man without making a grimace,' said he, when the sleigh had disappeared through the gate.

In Mark's room all was now quiet. The manager visited the farms, counted, and bargained with merchants, gathered money and was silent.

But a keen eye could easily see that he was tormented by some uneasiness. He often looked on the road, listened attentively at every sound, and awaited his brother's return.

After a week he drove to the other side of the river. The Dubissa was covered with

thick ice, the water-mills were silent, the ferry-boat was on the shore. The light sleigh glided over the river, the winter road passed near Skomont. Mark urged his horses; it was very unpleasant for him now to look at his father's house.

Suddenly Witold's jingling sleigh rushed on him impetuously.

In the sleigh sat Kazimiez, wrapped in his large sheep-skin coat.

'Wait! wait!' cried he; 'where are you going, my soul?'

'To Sandwile!' answered Mark, stopping.

'I am going with you . . . I am glad I met you.'

He seated himself in Mark's sleigh and they drove towards the village.

Mark, as usual, did not ask any questions, although, perhaps for the first time in his life, he was anxious to learn something.

'I was coming to you,' began his half-brother. 'It's time for me to return to Ryga. They were very hospitable, but it wouldn't be proper to stay too long. Mother has given me a pud (forty pounds) of bacon and cheese. I pity her. She is alone—'

'But Witold is there,' interrupted Mark.

'*He?* He is only a boy, and all the trouble is on her head,' said Kazimiez, and sighed. 'As soon as I understood her situation I did not say a word about the legacy. Why should I torment the poor woman? But she,

good soul, began of herself, and said, with tears in her eyes, "Your father left Ejniki for you, then take it. But I have no money. I was ill, and the druggist has taken all." She is a true saint. She took out her jewels and handed them to me. Something pricked my heart, and I asked her to accept them from me as a present. For, dear brother, do I need that five thousand roubles or mother's sapphires and pearls? I have no wife, and it would not be proper to make a gipsy girl a present of mother's jewels. I accepted the bacon, for it will be fine to eat with my friends after vodka.'

'And what about Ejniki?' asked Mark, after a moment's silence.

'They returned it to me. I have seen it with Witold, but we were both a little bit tipsy and didn't see much. Witold has excellent brandy.' He smacked his lips and asked, 'Have you anything to eat in your house?'

Mark nodded and then asked,—

'What do you propose doing with the estate?'

'They advised me to find a tenant for it. They even brought a man who offered me six hundred roubles a year, but I asked seven hundred.'

'I will give you seven hundred,' muttered the giant.

'Will you? You can take it then. You

are a famous farmer. You will improve my land, then I shall be able to sell it at a better price.'

'You will sell it? Are you not going to stay on the land?' murmured Mark.

'Ha! ha! How ridiculous! Of course I shall remain on the land, for heaven is too high.'

'Then you are going away again?'

'I must, dear brother. I can't stay here and dig the land when there are millions waiting for me. I will tell you a secret. Three of us went into partnership, and we are doing some business with the Kirgizes. We send cotton fabrics into their steppes, and exchange them for cattle and camel's hair. We make a hundred per cent. profit. Do I then need Ejniki?'

'If you wish to sell it, give me the preference,' said Mark, slowly. 'I can't buy it now, but in a couple of years I shall be able to do so.'

'With pleasure, my soul. Hu, it's cold! Thank God we have not far to go.'

The sleigh entered the street.

In front of them was a crowd of people and many sleighs. Several musical instruments were making an awful noise, several voices were singing.

'What is it? A pardon?' asked Kazimiez.

Mark did not answer. He turned to one side, reined in the horse and looked.

In the first sleigh was a band of musicians, then came another sleigh full of gaily-dressed girls and young women, then several young men on horseback, lastly a sleigh covered with a bright rug, and on it a beautiful, fair-haired girl and a swarthy youth—they were both smiling.

Then again sleighs and people on horseback, followed by shouting children on foot.

The procession passed Mark and his brother and the dog Margas, who, angry at the noise, howled sadly.

All passed quickly and disappeared before Mark could answer his brother.

'It's a wedding.'

'I recognised that myself. The bride is very pretty. Are you acquainted with her?'

'Yes.'

'Then you were going to the wedding?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

There was no answer. Mark urged the horse, they passed through the village like the wind, and entered the courtyard of the farm. No one there was thinking about the wedding.

Grenis, dressed in a big sheep-skin coat, was watering the old mare Bialka and talking to the peaceful colt; Ragis was coming from the barn, bargaining with a Jew about the price of some grain; and Miss Aneta was standing with a servant, at the doorway of the pig-sty, holding a council as to what

would be best to give the already fat quadrupeds to eat to make them still fatter.

'May God be blessed!' greeted Mark.

'For ages!' they answered joyfully.

'I have brought you a guest,' said he.

Grenis wiped his nose with his sleeve and led the horse to the stable. Miss Aneta opened her arms, and Ragis, evidently not satisfied with the price offered, motioned the Jew to the door.

At last Mark could be silent. The old couple took hold of Kazimiez.

The giant entered the room last, sat down on Miss Aneta's trunk, and hanging his head, remained thinking; he did not mix in the conversation.

He heard the words as though in a slumber—his aunt's sweet voice, his brother's broken Polish, and Ragis's exclamations.

Suddenly the cripple leaped as though someone had burnt him.

'What? You return?' shouted he, standing in front of Kazimiez.

'What is the matter?' said the latter, opening his eyes wide, astonished that they should ask him about such a natural course.

There was deep silence.

'Then why did you come?' said the old man, gloomily.

'Well, Mark wrote that father had died.'

'Then what? It's already two years since we buried him.'

'Aha! Time flies like a despatch by wire,' sighed Kazimiez.

'Have you visited his grave?' asked Miss Aneta, quietly.

'Dearest aunt, I have had no time. I shall visit it next time I come here.'

Ragis turned on his heel and looked at his godson.

'Mark!' shouted he.

The giant raised his head and looked at him gloomily.

'What do you want?' asked he, indifferently.

'Were you not present at your father's death? Did you not hear what he said?'

The young man came to his senses, looked at the people present, guessed what the question was about and said,—

'I heard what he said to me and I have done as he wished.'

'But don't you remember what he said about him? Ho, ho! Of course they did not deposit his money with you and did not say what you had to do with him, but just the same you ought to fulfil your father's last will.'

'I have always done so in everything,' he muttered angrily.

'Yes, you have,' answered Ragis, with animation. 'You ought to have told him: "Father preserved the land for you and left you his blessing if you have not forgotten

either your language or your faith. For the language is a great power and faith is a great blessing." Is it not so, Kazimiez? Do you understand me?'

Kazimiez looked at Ragis. Having come out of the cold, and being under the influence of drink, he became doleful and was near crying.

'Yes, yes,' said he, sighing, 'you are right. I know you are right. My father was a saint that he did not forget me. I wanted to return and beg his pardon, but the devil stopped me from doing so. But there, I was neither stealing nor idle. Only I amused myself a little bit, but I did not forget you.'

'Then remain with us,' whispered Miss Aneta, coming to the table and filling his glass, for which he immediately stretched out his arm.

'Dear aunt, I can't. I swear to you I can't,' said he, having drank. 'We must buy camel's hair and gather roubles. When I return I shall be rich like Rothschild, and I will give you any amount of money you would like to have.'

'Which means that your father's blessing is not for you,' said Ragis, sitting down on a bench.

He understood that with this man he could not talk as man with man. Again his aunt filled his glass.

Kazimiez drank, made grimaces, spat, and could hardly speak.

'I have not drunk anything better in St Petersburg; it's delicious. Why is father's blessing not for me? I am an honest man. I will order a monument of gold to be built for him. I have not forgotten my people. Well, I don't feel . . .'

He became pale as though he were fainting. All rushed to him.

'What is the matter with him?' said Ragis.

'Nothing, nothing,' whispered Miss Aneta, mysteriously. 'Carry him to your room and put him to bed; it's necessary.'

'What is necessary?' inquired the old man, but Miss Aneta put her fingers on her lips, and having looked round, she added very softly,—

'It was the last glass he drank. I gave him some medicine which will cure him.'

'Aha!' Ragis's face became radiant. 'That's right! I approve of that!'

Kazimiez moaned dreadfully, perspiration covered his temples. Mark took him in his arms like a child and carried him to the other room. The cripple followed.

They returned after a while, shaking their heads.

'Was there not too much of that pimpernel?' asked Ragis.

'No, no. Just the right measure,' said she, positively.

'God preserve a Christian from such a

measure and such a drink. You are very hospitable.'

'I pondered for a long time whether I should give it or not. But to-night I dreamed about my brother and he did not forbid me to do it. It's a severe sickness.'

'If you could give him some medicine for that camel's hair,' rejoined Ragis, 'for that also is a severe sickness.'

'God will find some remedy,' whispered the old woman, taking away the potion.

At that moment Mark looked through the window. From afar, the train of wedding attendants was coming back—still more noisy. The wedding ceremony was over.

Old Woynat received the young couple, offering them bread and salt; the guests wished them long years of happiness and prosperity; the band played a dance.

In Mark's courtyard the dog Margas howled a second time; Ragis's dogs and Mark's soul accompanied him. Since he was a boy he had thought about this day and it had come. The play was the same and the stage was familiar; only the actors were changed, and there was no room for him.

CHAPTER V

THE lark soared aloft and called mankind to work.

Then a grey crowd of workmen, numerous as ants, came forth from the houses and scattered over fields, and the earth resounded with noise and movement.

The Zmudzian goddess of spring, Pergrubia, was walking through the fields and forests, teaching the birds to sing, the flowers to blossom; she clothed the grey sky with a blue dress, the fields with a dress of green; at last she rested on the swollen waves of the river Dubissa and urged the rest of the floating ice to retreat.

The herdsman, driving the cattle beyond the river, saw the sorceress from time to time. She arose from the thicket, she was white and similar to the mist, and she stretched herself out in the ravines, leaving traces of her presence in the form of diamond-like dew; then the sun took it and carried it to the black oak grove, which was very difficult to wake up.

The storks arrived in a long row; weary with their long journey, they sat on the straw

roof of the barn, having recognised their old nests.

One evening a couple flew for a long time over Sandwile; at length they descended majestically on Mark's farm and rattled their beaks.

Formerly they had been afraid of the roofs full of holes, and no one had called them; now on the top of the barn an old wheel was waiting their arrival; they understood that they were welcome, and came and thanked for their reception.

Ragis, smiling, greeted them with Zmudzian enthusiasm; Miss Aneta looked joyfully from the garden, where she was working all day long; even Grenis, having returned from the field, forgot discipline and shouted to the corporal,—

'Have you seen the storks, sir?'

The guests settled, Ragis rubbed his hands. He waited impatiently for Mark. How glad he will be seeing the nest!

But Mark had not shown up since his visit with Kazimiez. He was ruling like a king in Poswicie, and had taken Ejniki and Budrajce under his control, but he did not come to see his god-father and aunt. The old servants from Skomont went to him; they could not get along with the German and the young master.

He engaged them all to work on his land, under Ragis's supervision, for he did not

interfere with his own affairs; only from time to time he went to see the water-mills, which started work with the beginning of spring.

They began to talk about him more and more. They said that in work and thrift he surpassed his father; they predicted he would make millions; mothers prayed God to grant them such a husband for their daughters; they envied Miss Janisewska, and, urged by curiosity, began to visit Jurgisk, to see Jadwisia, the supposed ideal of the silent man.

There was some gossip about Skomont. Witold returned from Ryga, where he led a fast life with some German actress of mediocre talent but who was very pretty. He spent a great deal of money on her, fought three duels on her account, and finally quarrelled with her mother.

Mrs Certwan's affairs could not have been very brilliant, for she wrote a very kind letter asking Mark to come and spend Easter with her.

Mark declined the invitation. He was invited by Jazwiglo to spend a holiday in Kowno, as it was time to make up the yearly accounts for the Poswicie estate.

At the Woynats the young couple were housekeeping. Martha's beauty still increased, there was every comfort in the house, but, despite all this, there was a lack of something. There were frequent quarrels. Woynat became sour and grumbled at something

every moment; Martha could not hold her tongue. Lukas, always timid, and in love with his wife, took her part.

The old man threatened every day to drive them out, the servants did not know whom to obey, and because of the uncertainty the young couple lost all desire for work.

The young woman often visited Miss Aneta, and although she laughed at Ragis's jokes, anyone could tell that she grew bitter. Her husband's continual sighing bored her.

One day, towards evening, she came to the old woman. There were traces of tears in her eyes although she chatted cheerfully.

'I've come to ask you for a design for homespun. No one has such taste as you have. How lovely your garden is!' she added, looking on the flowers over the new fence.

'Thank you, my beautiful one, for your compliment,' answered the old woman. 'I have some designs and will give them you willingly. How is your husband?'

'Thank you, a little better; he went to his farm to-day, for I think we shall leave grandfather.'

She laughed with an effort, and added,—

'Bread cut with another's knife is not very wholesome. Mr Ragis is not home?'

'No, he went to the farm of Zwirble, and as he took his rifle with him I am sure he will try to shoot some ducks.'

They sat on the bench in the garden. The evening was lovely, seething with noise of insects, fragrant with buds of the birch tree.

The old woman folded her toil-worn hands, and Martha looked at the clean courtyard. The farm was shining with order.

'You have a lucky hand,' said the young woman. 'It's not in vain that Mr Ragis is a sorcerer. Everything grows in your hands.'

'The greatest sorcerer is God, and the miraculous Virgin from Ugian. It's not our good luck, but Mark's. He is an orphan, his family have deserted and wronged him. God loves and helps such a man.'

Martha lowered her eyes. She had long understood that by the weakness of her character she had spoiled her lot. This feeling made her relations with her god-father still more bitter. The probability was that Woynat himself regretted his anger.

At that moment the noise of a carriage was heard on the road. They both looked. And the world became bright. 'It's Mark with Mr Ragis,' cried Miss Aneta.

She went swiftly to open the gate, the young man sprang from the carriage.

'Do you see the stork?' cried Ragis, from the van.

Mark raised his head and retreated. He had not expected to see his ex-bride here. The blood rushed to his face, he lowered his eyes.

'From where does God bring you?' said his aunt, joyfully. 'Come, come, we were longing for you.'

He came. The flush disappeared slowly. He raised his cap to Martha and greeted her shortly.

'Good-evening!'

'You must ask me where I caught him!' cried Ragis, from the courtyard. 'Ho! ho! of course the old oak rustles and it's known where this heathen likes to go. He prayed to the tree. I have caught him. Good-evening, Mrs Gral! Did you come secretly to get a love potion?'

Martha laughed frolicsomely in her old way.

'As you are a sorcerer, you know without my answer. Good-bye. I will take the designs to-morrow.'

She went out swiftly. Ragis looked after her and said discreetly,—

'I know that one beautiful day you will devour each other. Good for nothing!'

He turned to the old woman.

'Do you know what he has brought us from Kowno? Ho! ho! I would tell you, but being a woman, perhaps you would faint.'

'I hope nothing bad,' said she, alarmed.

'You are frightened already. Ho! ho! and when I heard, I wanted to dance. My wooden leg wanted to jump. Of course, Miss Aneta, we shall have a wedding. Ho! ho!'

'Mark's?' asked she, joyfully.

'Why not mine?' said the old man, twisting his moustachios.

'You are not in a hurry. Mark, you came then from Kowno?'

'From Kowno and Wilno. I have brought you some seeds. Jazwiglo and his family send you their kind regards.'

'And Kazimiez—nothing?' rejoined Ragis.

'What Kazimiez?' interrupted the old woman.

'Of course ours.'

'But he is not there!'

Something like a smile crossed Mark's lips.

'I took him there in the winter, he is there still,' said he.

'Good gracious! What is he doing there?'

'Well, I thought I saw a ghost in the Jazwiglos' drawing-room. The old man's daughter was embroidering and he was reading aloud to her. I went again, they were the same; also the third and fourth days. I left them thus.'

'Miss Aneta's potion worked a miracle,' laughed Ragis, rubbing his hands. 'He doesn't think any more about camel's hair.'

'He told me that he should start a store in Kowno. He doesn't touch vodka any more, and you can understand what he says.'

Tears rolled down the old lady's face.

'Miraculous are the ways of Providence!' sighed she.

'His father's blessing helped him. My brother must be pleased in heaven.'

'But the Orwids have not returned yet,' muttered Mark. 'Jazwiglo has heard nothing either. We have made up the accounts. Two hundred thousand is deposited in the bank, and how much more there will be in ten years! And for whom?'

'Suffer a little longer and then go to the priest for advice. Perhaps he would give you a dispensation from the oath.'

The aunt said solemnly,—

'Be patient, Mark, be patient. You will see, they will return.'

The young man made a movement with his hand and rose.

'My bad luck will not allow me to see them,' said he, apathetically.

'Boy, what is the matter with you?' said Ragis. 'It makes me angry to listen to your talk. Don't sin. Everything goes smoothly with you. Have you not seen the stork?'

'People praise you,' added Miss Aneta.

'People told Jazwiglo that I stole from Poswicie. When he looked through the accounts and saw that there was one thousand roubles more income than usual, he cried from grief and indignation. And do you know where the slander came from? From Skomont. Witold tells it to everyone.'

He set his teeth and walked to and fro in the room.

'The scoundrel!' said Ragis, angrily.

'But when they require money they come to me for it. To-day, when you met me, I was going to see step-mother.'

'Why do you give to them?' asked Ragis.

'To prevent anyone else giving.'

Miss Aneta said, with her customary sweetness,—

'Mark, you work honestly, and you have not wronged or cursed anyone, therefore you are rich and happy. Be assured, after bad there will come good days, and you will be rewarded for your sorrow. Don't be sorrowful. Such is the order in this world. Come to the garden and see how beautifully everything grows. You are tired by the road, and your head is burning. . . . Are you well?'

The old woman exercised a strange influence by her sweetness. Mark's despair disappeared after those delicate words of solicitude.

'Aunt, I thank you,' whispered he. 'I often have a headache, but it's a trifle.'

'And you don't say anything. Every sickness begins with a trifle and might be cured with a trifle, with an herb. You are a bad boy not to have told me. The dew is falling, better come to the room. I will prepare you a potion, it will help you. Come, my dear boy, come . . .'

'He doesn't need any herbs,' said Ragis,

'but a wife. It's clear. I know by myself. A bachelor understands a bachelor.'

He forced himself to be joyful in order to distract the sorrowful man. For supper they gave him different dainties; wishing to please the old woman, he drank some awful potion, and then chatted a little.

Towards midnight Ragis and he retired to the same room. It was cool; the old man made a fire and they went to bed.

Mark stretched himself with pleasure, looked on his beloved knight in a coat of iron and wondered which was worse—those fearful bloody fights with the Knights of the Cross in the times of yore, or this paltry, mean wrestling with fate, these bloodless fights, these thousands of small blows, this oppressing atmosphere of the century.

The knight's face was fierce but calm; his profile was stubborn but full of will; he chased the enemy with faith and hope of victory, but his descendant did not possess that hope any more. He substituted energy for passive apathy; that inward fight was devouring his soul.

The young man felt ashamed. It seemed to him that the black hero became animated, and looked on him contemptuously, that he turned the sword towards himself, pointing it to his wounds and many scars, and then he galloped on, on, to fight for the holy idea of the defence of the land.

Thanks either to the influence of his aunt's herbs or to his night's rest, Mark rose next day tranquillised and full of his former energy. He was well. He pushed mortal censure of the people to the depths of his soul and kissed his aunt's hand.

'What did you dream about?' asked she, preparing him breakfast.

'A bear—I killed a bear,' said he.

She clasped her hands joyfully,

'What a lovely dream! It means a wedding.'

'Upon my word,' rejoined Ragis, 'you had better marry. I have inquired about that girl from Jurgisk, and I learn that she is sweet and quiet; she will not weary you with her prattle.'

'I don't want her.'

'Why not?'

'Because she is silent. I don't like to talk with anybody, but with my wife I would like to talk and tell her everything.'

'A good reason indeed. But she will be willing to listen to you.'

Mark thought for a while, pondering the words.

'I don't know how to express myself, but Miss Janisewska is not for me. Perhaps she is too good. . . . At anyrate, she doesn't suit me, and then I can't think of her now. Why have a wife and sorrow? It's better to be alone.'

He was getting ready to depart; they could not persuade him to remain any longer.

On foot, with a rifle and his faithful dog Margas, he went to Skomont.

The storks were standing thoughtful on their nests, as if watching the work in the courtyard; the cherry trees at the Woynats rustled as he passed, and a moment later Lukas Gral rushed into the street, joined him and greeted him timidly.

He was going with a bridle in his hand, apparently after horses, and accompanied Mark to the highway.

'I have not seen you for a long time,' said he at last.

'Not since your wedding-day,' answered Mark, quietly.

'You have forgotten us.'

'Not at all.'

'Then you must be angry,' whispered Gral, looking on the ground.

'No. Maybe it is you?'

'Oh, no! But for a long time sorrow has devoured me. An unhappy man should not mingle with the people.'

'You have what you wished for.'

'Everyone says, "You have a beautiful wife—and plenty." It's true, but I am not happy. What am I now? A farm boy to Woynat. Before the wedding he asked me to assign my land to him, otherwise he did not want to give me Martha, and now he

drives me away. I could get along if I were alone, but with a wife. I will work very hard, but I won't allow her to work. Such is my fate and my riches.'

'You wished for it,' repeated Mark, implacably. Gral hung his head and still followed Mark.

'Help me,' muttered he.

The giant glanced at him.

'Do you expect me to intercede in your behalf with Woynat?' murmured he.

'Not at all! One day I shall go to live in my house. I need only some work. You have so many enterprises, employ me. I will leave Martha and will go to work for her bread.'

Mark glanced at him again. What a strange lot! He, Mark, was going to furnish bread for Martha. To him who was wronged they came for help. Perhaps they will pay him with ingratitude for that bread.

'We lived as brothers for so many years,' continued Gral, sadly. 'We have known each other from childhood. You know that I am sober and honest. We never quarrelled. You are lucky with everything, and all I take breaks in my hands. I shall work still more now, for I am not alone, and I should like to see Martha happy. She doesn't say anything, but she cries often, and I reproach myself with having spoiled her happiness. It's my worst worry. Help me in a brotherly way as formerly.'

A great many words rushed to Mark's lips, but he was silent as usual, and did not pronounce any of them, only he said shortly,—

'Very well, I will help you.'

Gral blushed; animated with hope, he lifted his head. Mark stopped and said,—

'Do you know Lake Wilajki?'

'Yes,' answered Gral.

'You will go there. I have heard that the tenant of it is dead. Talk with the fishermen and see the owner. You may offer him a hundred roubles more for it. Here is some money to pay on account; draw an agreement in my and your name. We will divide the profit. I shall expect you back the day after to-morrow.'

This abrupt and precise order sounded to Gral like an angel's choir and filled him with respect. He did not dare to question.

Since a certain time his former companion had become a man of importance, whilst he had grown smaller and smaller. He felt now that he was his servant, and even this he considered a favour.

He took a couple of hundred roubles from Mark, who fixed the rifle on his shoulder and went swiftly in the direction of Skomont.

For him time was precious; he did not like to waste it.

An hour later there came out from the Woynats' farm a van, and in it Gral, smoking a pipe and thoughtful. No one knew where

he was going, except perhaps his wife, for there was a smile on her lips, and she looked for a long time in a mirror.

Maybe she was searching in her eyes for the secret of Mark's help ; maybe she was already thinking how she should pay him for the favour shown to them, in case he should ask.

. . . . . .

And Devaytis was rustling. Among the young leaves there was whispering the breath of the goddess enchantress, and round the oak his grand-children were bowing to him humbly ; here and there a silvery birch tree was peeping timidly on the glade, like Alexota's enchanted servant, looking for fire and sacrifice.

During the dark night the heaths and ferns rustled ; the worshipper was coming to the god.

He stopped not far from it, uncovered his head, and leaning on his rifle stood looking at the boughs. Long cold, snow and winds passed without leaving any traces on the body of the giant ; he seemed still stronger.

'You are happy, nothing ails you,' whispered the man with a shade of jealousy in his admiration.

The top of the oak was moved as with a smile of contemptuous slighting.

'Nothing ails me as long as I have earth and sun. The winter, like sorrow, lasts a long time, and the summer, like happiness,

passes quickly. I have been standing here for centuries and God has never deprived me of summer; the sun animates everyone. There will come a day in which wounds will be healed.'

'Will it come?' muttered the crushed man.

The oak moved as though it were angry.

'Man, ephemeride, have you ever seen the ice that the sun would not melt? Have you ever seen the fields that Pergrubia would not wake? I have stood here for ten centuries, and I know that everything passes. The one who is strong will stand the worst.'

The moon shone forth and lighted the face of the solitary man.

His sharp features softened little by little, he stretched himself proudly.

'I shall stand,' said he in a half whisper. At that moment the dog barked. The man, as if seized in the act of committing a crime, looked round suspiciously, pulled his cap over his ear and rushed by a path towards the shore. On the water a boat was splashing, and some pious singing flew with the waves. After a while there was heard a conversation.

'Who is there?'

'It's I, sir,' answered the voice of the groom from Poswicie.

'What do you want?' asked Mark, uneasily.

The boat came to the shore. Instead of replying, the man handed Mark a telegram and waited for orders.

Mark, surprised, opened it. Who could be so pressing?

By the moon and his pipe light he read,—

'Orwid lives. A letter follows.—ANNA CERTWAN.'

Mark began to tremble, as though he were cold; it seemed to him that he was struck by a thunderbolt, and his heart throbbed faster and faster.

'Orwid lives!' He repeated the joyful news to the oak grove, to the river, to the sky, and to the astonished groom, who had long since forgotten that there was another master of Poswicie.

'What do you say, sir?' asked he, stupidly.

'Go!' commanded Mark, springing into the boat and seizing the long oar. Margas, who had been forgotten, whimpered pitifully, then losing all hope of his master returning he jumped into the river and swam after him, but Mark did not remember anything, did not see anything.

'Orwid lives! lives!' resounded in his soul like a hosanna.

He rushed into his apartment, and for the first time the best horses, slumbering over the manger, understood what work meant.

One messenger galloped to the post-office in Grynia, another to Kowno, a third to Rossien, and there was a great movement in the *château.*

Mark did not go to bed at all. 'Orwid lives!' resounded continually in his ears and sufficed for rest, for food, for the whole world.

He lives. Probably Hanka has seen him, spoken with him. Perhaps he is already on the way; he may come at any moment. He must be an emigrant; perhaps Kazimiez's son, or maybe himself. Why did he not write? Why was he so slow in coming? The house must be ready for his reception.'

Mark, all his life slow and silent, became animated and talkative.

At midnight, MrKazimiez Orwid's hundred-years-old nurse and centenarian butler were awakened. The old couple thought the end of the world had come when they were called to the manager. They came half asleep.

'We expect Mr Orwid any day,' shouted he into their ears.

The respectable couple were deaf and stupefied by being disturbed.

They did not hear his words, but thinking he must have sad news to communicate to good people to wake them up at such an hour, they shook their heads.

'Have the house ready, dust it, air it, clean the silver,' shouted Mark further.

The same signs signified readiness to obey. The old woman was nearly crying, the old man's nose grew red.

At that moment the messenger who had been sent to the post-office rushed in, spotted

with mud. The old couple crept out from the presence of the fearful master.

'Mr Filemen, did you hear what has happened?' said the poor old woman.

'Yes, I heard. I am not deaf, and the master spoke quietly but distinctly. He said that any day they expect war, so . . .'

'Not at all! Not a war, but St John appeared in the oak grove. A miracle has happened. The master shouted so that my ears ache: you are thinking only about the war.'

Further conversation was stopped behind the door of the *château.*

There was a letter from Hanka. Mark read it feverishly.

'Dear Brother,—Since a month ago I have possessed that important news for you, but as I was not certain I did not write to disturb your peace with what was perhaps false information. But now I can tell you that the Orwids' successor to Kazimiez from Poswicie lives in America.

'It was as follows: In winter, as the result of my name being printed in newspapers because of some report about women studying in the Sorbonne, I received a letter from the United States. It was signed "Marwitz," who asked me, very politely, whether I did not know someone in Russia having the same name as mine.

'I sent him our genealogy. Julka thought

it would be some American succession. It was better. I received another letter. Mr Marwitz, a rich man from Illinois, wrote me that in his house is Kazimiez Orwid's child, whose parents died a long time since. They mentioned that they had an estate in Russia and a friend whose name was the same as mine. Could I inform them where he could be found? Naturally I answered them; that was a week ago. How glad I am that at last you will be free. Often it is very hard here for me, but according to your advice I do not complain. I should like you to be satisfied with me.—Your sister, HANKA.'

Mark breathed. He was saved. His slavery might last a couple of weeks or so, but it would be ended. Now he must have the house ready and go to Kowno; there, with Jazwiglo, he will await the successor.

The earth was burning under his feet. In the *château* there was feverish movement; the news went from lip to lip, from old to young, and everywhere it was received with regret.

'For twenty years the Certwans were our masters. The others are strangers; perhaps they are good, but they are strangers just the same. And the Certwans are ours. There could be none better in the world. What a pity!'

When the next day came and Mark was

ready to go to Kowno, a few men, who were the boldest, came to wish him 'good-bye.'

'But you will return, sir?' they asked him with uneasiness.

'I shall return with the Orwids to give up my services here,' answered he, joyfully.

He rushed like a hurricane through the village. The old couple were not at home; Miss Aneta was digging up some roots in the oak grove, Ragis was surveying the fields. He wrote a few words for them, and stuck the note in the window; he would have liked to shout the joyful news to every passer-by.

In Kowno, Jazwiglo did not recognise him.

'What is the matter?' said he, frightened. 'Speak!'

'Orwid liveth!' shouted he without his customary thought. 'Mr Kazimiez's successor wrote to Hanka from America. Have you had a letter?'

'I have had plenty of letters, but not from the Orwids. Are they really Orwids? Perhaps some American humbug? Tell me all about it.'

The old lawyer thought for a long time after hearing the narrative; this news seemed like a fable. The Zmudzian was cautious.

'Let us wait for the letter,' said he at last.

And they waited. Mark went several times a day to the telegraph and post-office, or sat in Jazwiglo's drawing-room admiring

his step-brother and Miss Marynia chatting together for hours and hours. What can people say to each other every day and all day long? He could not understand it, and never listened to their conversation.

Only once, when they were both going to the hotel, he asked Kazimiez,—

'What about your company and the business with the Kirgizes?'

'May the dogs devour them,' answered Kazimiez. 'Am I a savage, to return to savages? Here I am as in Paradise, dear brother. I am looking for a position, for I should like to marry. It's bad to be alone. What?'

'Yes,' assented Mark, distracted.

The same day Jazwiglo came to his daughter's room, apparently by accident, and began by asking her what she proposed giving them for dinner the next day. Then he asked about the price of meat, about bakers; finally he placed his round figure on a little sofa, and after smoking his pipe for a long while in silence, said,—

'I hear that Kazimiez Certwan is going back to Russia.'

Miss Marynia had bushy eyebrows, lively eyes and great determination in her features. Brought up without a mother, she was mistress of the house and had long been accustomed to quick decision.

'I think, papa, you're mistaken,' she

answered quietly, 'Mr Certwan ought to remain in the country.'

'What for?' said the old man with apparent indifference. 'There his career is ready and he has a sure position, whilst here—'

'But here also he has a position and a duty,' answered the girl.

'But why does he not help his mother and stay with her?'

Miss Marynia made an energetic movement.

'No one has asked him to do so. Then his mother has squandered his money, and has given him a half-ruined farm on which he could not live. I think he did enough for his family when he said nothing about it.'

'Aha, is that so? I did not know. I see I can learn a great many things from you.'

The girl looked attentively at her father's face. She felt the sting; she did not like to be in a false position.

'It is no wonder that I know,' she answered quietly, 'for Mr Kazimiez is very sincere, and he has become much attached to us.'

'Umh, if that's it, why does he not speak with me?'

'He will do so,' smiled she, 'but first he must remember his own language and get a position.'

'Aha! You guarantee that he will talk

with me? If it's as you say, then I will wait.'

The old man rose from the sofa tranquillised and retired. They were both true Zmudzians; they did not waste time, but they understood each other very well.

The next day the brothers came at the usual hour. Kazimiez was joyful, Mark gloomy.

'Have you had the letter?' asked he, entering the lawyer's office.

'Good morning, Mark,' answered the host, slowly. 'Do you understand English?'

'No, why?'

'Because Americans are something like Englishmen, and the letter is written in English.'

'Then you have a letter?'

'Yes. But I don't know where it is. There are so many papers on my desk. Here it is, but you had better call Marynia, for neither of us can understand it.'

Mark rushed into the drawing-room. Marynia was willing to translate the letter, and as Kazimiez had studied English in the business college, he proposed to help her.

The letter read as follows:—

'Dear Sir,—I have learned from Miss Certwan, in Paris, that you administer the estate of the late Kazimiez Orwid. As the correspondence is slow, I send you Kazimiez Orwid's child. Such was his will. Miss

Certwan assures me that I am writing to an honest man, therefore I beg of you to help the orphan, who sails to-day to Libawa by the German steamer *Aurora*. My letter precedes her only a couple of days. Yours truly, MARWITZ.'

'It's a girl!' rejoined Jazwiglo.

'Evidently,' answered the daughter, 'for this is written "her."'

'Shall I go to Libawa?' asked Mark.

'What for?' answered the old man. 'Suppose you pass each other on the road? She will come alone to Kowno. American girls are energetic women, I once read, but I don't remember the title of the novel.'

'Then perhaps it's time to go to the station?' said Mark.

'Are you crazy? Not to-day! Let us count the days. Marynia, when was the letter written? I only hope that the steamer will not be wrecked . . .'

Mark turned pale. He took his cap and rushed to the station. 'Lord! Lord! would those Orwids ever separate themselves from his lot? Would they give him a moment of peace and tranquillity?' These last moments of expectation were killing him morally. He began to hate the name of Orwid.

There was still half an hour before the train arrived. He began to walk on the platform, looking into the distance, where the

rails were stretched in a long straight line. It seemed that they were endless. At last a dark spot appeared, the iron monster was coming, welcomed by the noise of the signals, by the tick of telegraphy. Mark waited with throbbing heart.

What will that cloud of smoke bring for him?

Freedom, or one more disappointment?

The train rolled majestically into the station. At the windows there appeared various faces; he looked at the women's hats as though he expected to see some sign, or the Orwids' name written on a face. They passed him, they disappeared; in the last window he perceived a little student's cap bearing the colours of a society.

The possessor of this cap, leaning out, greeted Mark by a homeric sneezing. It was a fine joke of the owner of Skomont.

Mark nodded indifferently. Witold's arrival was worse than disappointment.

'*Morgen!*' said the student, in greeting, shortening the words. 'What? Are you going to travel? Are you not afraid to go so far from home? Look out that they don't steal you!'

He laughed at his joke and withdrew from the window. The train stopped. A moment later he appeared on the platform. He was small and thin; his clothing was tight and short; smoking a cigar, and smiling cynically, he followed a porter who carried his luggage

and led a poodle dog. He hummed some German valse and looked impertinently into the women's eyes.

Mark looked round at the crowd. He searched for that American girl, he listened to the conversation, and followed every young girl with his eyes. In vain! The platform became empty, the crowd disappeared through the door of the refreshment room and dispersed slowly. The iron monster had brought him a new disappointment.

He hung his head, and discouraged, he went towards the carriage stand. Suddenly he heard Jazwiglo's name pronounced behind him.

He shivered and turned. A young man, elegantly dressed, and looking like a cultivated business man, spoke in bad German to a porter, on whose face there was depicted a desire to get rid of the stranger by the typical Zmudzian expression, 'I don't understand!'

Mark had a presentiment. He approached them. He spoke German and French. Overcoming his natural reserve, he raised his cap and asked,—

'Excuse me, are you inquiring about Mr Jazwiglo?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the stranger, touching his hat and looking with a kind of surprise at the gigantic size of his interlocutor.

'Have you business with him?'

'H'm, not exactly,' muttered the newcomer. 'Could you give me his address?'

'With pleasure.'

At that moment Witold passed them, coming from the refreshment room. He whistled piercingly like an urchin.

'Phi, phi! How beautifully you talk German!' said he, stopping. 'Have you studied it while surveying oxen? Have a cigar?'

'No, thank you!'

'Don't mention it. How long are you going to stay here?'

'I don't know.'

'At anyrate come and see me at the hotel. I have something like business with you.'

'In that case I shall expect to see you at my hotel.'

'You may wait and then be stuffed and painted green. Good-bye! You've the Certwans' pride.'

He turned on his heel, and whistling, entered a cab. In the meantime the stranger was listening patiently to the conversation in a strange language, and asked suddenly,—

'What did that chap say at the end?'

'Nothing interesting,' answered Mark, gloomily.

'He said "Certwan." What Certwan is here? Do you know a Certwan?' asked the newcomer, emphatically.

'Yes, I do.'

'Then conduct me to Certwan. I don't need Jazwiglo any longer. How far have we to drive? You know Certwan, Poswicie . . .'

'What do you want with Certwan?' asked Mark, trembling.

'That I shall tell to himself,' answered the stranger, quite stiffly.

'Are you Orwid?' asked Mark.

The stranger retreated a step.

'You know about the Orwids?' he asked with animation.

'We have been awaiting their return for twenty years. Are you Kazimiez's son?'

'And are you Certwan—that legendary Certwan? What a meeting! Did you get my letter?'

'I have read the letter written to Jazwiglo.'

'Come with me.'

These short questions and answers were pronounced very quickly. The newcomer turned towards the station. Mark followed him, examining the son of a hero.

Strange thing! The young man did not bear a family likeness at all, well known to Mark from portraits and tradition.

The Orwids were dark haired—he was fair. They had characteristic bushy eyebrows and dark hair—his hair was yellowish and grey, very cold eyes. He did not retain any reminiscence of his fatherland; he did not

understand a word of his language; he was a foreigner entirely.

And again Mark thought that his father would have been happy had he lived long enough to have seen this man. He was hardened for surprises, but the old man would not have borne so easily the picture of such a ruin of his ideals.

He walked silently through the almost empty station to the first-class waiting-room, and wondered why was he brought there. Perhaps the newcomer wished to show him that broken seal ring, half of which he faithfully carried on his chest.

The porter opened the door, the American politely let him pass first. The waiting-room was full of small luggage and packages, but no one was in it.

For a moment Mark looked inquiringly on his companion; a curtain opened at the other end of the room, and a joyful young voice asked in English,—

'Well, Clarke, have you found that lawyer?'

The American advanced a few steps and smiled proudly.

'I have found better than that. Permit me to introduce you to Mr Certwan.'

The curtain was thrown back. A young girl, clad in an elegant travelling dress, appeared.

The fair-haired Zmudzian and tall, black-

haired American looked at each other for a while.

There was diffidence in the looks of both. The girl contracted her bushy dark eyebrows and said quietly,—

'It's not true. Someone has led you into error, Clarke. This gentleman is not Certwan.'

This time she spoke in French, evidently wishing that Mark should understand what she was saying.

Mark shrugged his shoulders.

'It's not I that need to prove my identity, but you,' answered he. 'Mr Jazwiglo doesn't live very far away,' said he with a bow, and turned to withdraw.

The American stopped him.

'But, Irene,' said he, with slight reproach in his voice, 'you don't possess the portrait of the administrator of Poswicie. Your remark, sir, is right. This young lady is Kazimiez Orwid's daughter, and I am Mr Marwitz, her escort.'

Mark bowed slightly.

'And you are Paul Certwan?' rejoined the young girl, distrustfully.

'Paul Certwan died over a year ago. My name is Mark; I am his eldest son.'

The girl's face brightened. She looked once more on the giant, and as if that examination had banished her last doubt, she

offered the young man her hand, clad in a Swedish glove.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said she.

He did not shake hands with her, but said with muffled voice,—

'Whilst dying, my father entrusted me with the administration of Poswicie. He commanded me to work on it and return it to the one who, besides official proof, would show me the sign on which the two friends agreed.'

'Did I not tell you that that little thing was of great importance. My father, dying, recommended me strongly neither to lose it nor to part with it.'

She opened a medallion, hanging on a chain, and took from it the half of a broken ring. Mark looked at it, and without saying a word he took from his chest his father's legacy—the second half of the ring. He handed it to the young girl.

He was happy, for he was standing at the gate of freedom.

Irene Orwid put the two parts of the ring together and read slowly,—

'Judge me, O God, and plead my cause.'

Marwitz looked over her shoulder, quite indifferent to the chivalrous episode.

'I thank you,' said the girl, a second time putting out her hand to him.

This time also Mark only bowed.

'You don't know whether I have deserved your thanks,' muttered he.

A strange thing. For so many years the name of Orwid had been united with his everyday sorrow, yet to-day he looked upon this redeemer from slavery as a foe.

He felt a kind of rancour towards her. He wanted to tell her:—'Poswicie has poisoned so many of my days, has robbed me of my freedom; do not thank me; I did not serve you, but my father's shadows. I shall be happy to leave you.'

He was silent, however, whilst she looked at him in surprise. She moved her head.

'Are you ashamed of my hand or yours?' she asked, frowning.

'Perhaps they don't shake hands in this country,' rejoined Marwitz, in a conciliatory way.

'It must be so. Well, then you are satisfied with my proofs of identity? May I have my father's estate?'

'You must see Mr Jazwiglo and discuss the legal details with him. He will help you in everything. Poswicie has been ready every day for twenty years to receive its owner. Kindly tell me what day I am to send a carriage for you.'

The girl put her hand to her head; the bad impression had passed away; in her dark eyes, very impressible for thoughts passing through her head, some light shone.

'Do you hear, Clarke? I shall take you in my own carriage, offer you my own bread, receive you in my own house. Do you hear? I have my own land and house, I—an orphan.'

'Were you not comfortable in our house?' asked Marwitz, gravely.

'You know I love you as my own family. But I am so happy now. Mr Certwan, then it's true? No one would take away my property, notwithstanding so many years? Then it's a fact that I have something in this country that belongs to me, that I am rich?'

'The land that has been preserved for you during twenty years will be yours,' answered he. 'You have a splendid house, you are rich.'

'And in the meantime?'

'You will go to Mr Jazwiglo. Here is his address. Permit me now to take leave of you. In case of need you will find me in Wilno Hotel.'

'Clarke, to what hotel shall we go?'

'The best will be Wilno Hotel,' answered the American, collecting the boxes. 'Mr Certwan will not abandon us in a strange city, I am sure.'

Irene raised her head proudly. 'Mr Certwan doesn't look as though he would be very serviceable. He will be glad to be rid of us. Is it not so?'

She looked into his eyes inquiringly.

'Until the moment when I give up the estate I consider myself your servant.'

'Is that true? I am glad of it. Then you will go with us to the hotel, you will introduce us to that lawyer, you will help us with your advice. Sometimes it seems to me that all this is a dream and that I shall wake up in America in my tutor's house. Now let us be going to the hotel; Clarke, my dear, order the boxes to be taken. Have you a cab?'

'It's waiting,' answered the American, putting the boxes in order with the help of a porter.

'Mr Certwan, let us be going then. Pray give me your arm.'

Marwitz smiled good-heartedly.

'I see I shall soon be dismissed.'

The young girl put her arm through Mark's, and leaning slightly on him, looked at the American.

'I should like to know what use you would be to me in this country? You are like a lost sheep yourself.'

She laughed heartily, and looking at Certwan, added,—

'I was five years old when my father died. I remembered, however, with the stubborn memory of a child, how he told me, "when you return to your country, you must love it, for although it's sad, it's worthy to be loved. And when you meet a Zmudzian, trust him,

for although he is silent, you can rely on him." Consequently, despite your gloomy mien, I am not afraid of you, and I trust you. . . . Conduct me.'

'But all the same, you said at first that I was a cheat,' muttered he.

'I did not expect to see a young man. Father spoke to me of an old friend. But I begged your pardon immediately.'

They came to the cab. Behind them Marwitz was putting the boxes into another.

Mark remained standing by the carriage.

'Will you not go with us?' he asked the American man.

'No, thank you. I must watch the boxes. I like peace above everything, and I am afraid of being scolded if anything is lost.'

'An owner of cotton mills and peace! What a contradiction!' laughed Irene. 'Mr Certwan, let us be going. I have had enough of travelling. I shall be glad to rest a little.'

'Go, and quickly, too!' Mark commanded the cabman.

'Is that the Lithuanian language you speak?' asked she.

'No, it's Polish.'

'Then here you have forgotten your own language?'

'Oh, not at all. We have not forgotten anything, and in our Zmudz history there is not written any deed of which we need

be ashamed! We are poor, and not very numerous, but we are honest.'

On his gloomy face there came from the depth of his soul a reflection of life and warmth.

Unwillingly, and by accident, she had touched the most sensitive side of his character. She struck, apparently, a shapeless clod of earth, and she did not expect to hear such a sonorous sound, or to see such fire in his cold eyes.

She looked at him with interest.

'Do you love your country very much?' asked she, gravely.

After a moment of enthusiasm he hung his head as though ashamed, and did not answer.

She looked at him continually.

'My father was right,' said she, after a while. 'This country must be worthy of love when the people are so enthusiastic at the mere mention of it. You may be silent. I know already what you are thinking about, and I know why you did not shake hands with me.'

'Why?' asked he, with interest.

'You blame me that for so many years I did not long after my country, that I did not come to work with you on my own land.'

He shrugged his shoulders. According to his idea, the work of a girl seventeen years old did not amount to much. He had never seen elegant young girls working; they read books, played the piano, looked after their

flowers and did embroidery, and they called it work. Exceptions to this they called indulgently extravagant.

Irene noticed his contemptuous expression. She read his thoughts.

'You have a wrong idea about woman's work,' said she, smilingly. 'It's strange that European men, when they speak about women, have that ugly expression on their faces. Evidently woman stands here very low, and is only a luxurious piece of furniture. Is that your sister who is studying at Sorbonne?'

'My step-sister.'

'Do you slight her in the same way?'

'We shall see when she has finished her studies.'

The young girl looked at the street. She glanced at the houses and shops and asked,—

'Is Kowno a village?'

'No, it's a city.'

'How dirty and poor! I imagine how displeased Clarke will be. After America, Europe makes a bad impression. How much dirt there is here, and how small and neglected everything is! Do the people here not think and not work?'

'The people who are defending the ground beneath their feet have no time to think whether roses grow on that ground or whether everything looks nice. On the outskirts they don't clean the roads.'

'Are you very much oppressed here?' asked she, seriously.

'You shall see,' answered he, and after long reflection, added,—'Every nation has its idea and its aim. We have for centuries defended two things—our religion and our land. And we have preserved both.'

The girl hung her head and thought about Mark. Who was he? Where was he brought up? What position did he occupy among his people? His face was burnt by winds and sun, it was hard, and apparently wild; his brown, strong hands testified that he worked physically; his clothes were shabby, and the locks of his fair hair did not often see a barber.

He looked like a workman, who had become rough, morally and physically, by care for bread. When he spoke, which he did unwillingly and with difficulty, his words were those of a man who thought deeply; his speech was short, precise, without beautiful sentences. Who was he? Would it be possible to tame him, and would he smile sometimes?

The cab stopped; it was the hotel. Mark perceived Witold's black poodle, and in the corridor one could hear the voice of the proprietor telling some story in German.

They entered. They opened an elegant apartment for the young girl. Marwitz came in with the boxes. Mark withdrew discreetly and went to his room.

'Halt!' cried Witold from his room. 'Who is that beautiful girl with whom you came? You must introduce me to her. Upon my word, I don't know what to do with my time in this hole of yours.'

The door was open and Mark saw his brother lying on the sofa. In the door stood a Jew agent smiling at his jokes.

'It will be best for you to go to Skomont,' Mark advised him, seriously. 'There you can utilise your time.'

'You are talking nonsense. There even Kafr is worried. Do you know Kafr? I paid one hundred roubles for him, but it's true that he is more intelligent than some great men. Kafr! Kafr! come here.'

He whistled without ceremony. Mark shrugged his shoulders and left him.

The Jew slipped out. They walked down a narrow corridor, talking.

'Does he wish to borrow some money?'

'Well, who doesn't?'

'Do they let him have it?'

'They would, but they are afraid.'

'Of whom?'

'They are afraid of Your Honour.'

'Tell them not to give him anything, for they will not get it back. Remember I have warned you.'

'I thank Your Honour.'

The Jew bent to the ground. Their conversation lasted only a few seconds and

again the agent stood at Witold's door, smiling at the tricks of the dog. When the animal had shown what he could perform, the young man lighted a cigar and began to talk business.

'Listen, Rubin, I need money.'

'Ah, who does not need it?' sighed the Jew.

'Then give it to me instead of moaning.'

'But how can I get it?'

'That's no concern of mine. Take it from your friends, scoundrels.'

'Such friends look for security.'

'Don't I give it them?'

'What security?'

'A mortgage on Skomont.'

'That's nice—you give it. But your brother, your mother and your sister could say the same. Well, how could I understand such a business?'

'You have forgotten the most important person—Mr Mark,' laughed Witold, and his pale cheeks became red.

'I have not forgotten him, I have not said anything about him, for he is a man who doesn't say anything; he has no time to talk. His head is full of business. I think he must be rich for he never borrows money.'

'He even lends it on security, the same as you do. It's not difficult. He has the safe of Poswicie at his disposition,' insinuated Witold, biting his finger nails.

'I don't know about that. I think his own safe is in his head.'

'Have you come here to praise Mark? I need money, do you hear me? I will give you any security you require.'

'Well, will you sell the forest?'

Some mischievous thoughts could be seen in the young man's eyes.

'The forest?' repeated he, slowly, smiling at his own idea. 'Perhaps it would be the best plan. Mr Rubin, you are a genius. The forest? Well, we shall see . . . come in the evening. Do you know who that young lady is? She is very pretty. I must go and find out who she is.'

He arranged his hair and cravat, and with hands stuck in his pockets went into the corridor.

A black board on which the names of the guests were written was not far off. He came to it with the Jew.

At that moment the hotel porter was writing the names of the new guests, and among them he wrote, 'Irene Orwid.'

The student's eyes dilated with surprise.

'Do you see?' he asked the Jew.

'Why should I not see? Orwid! Mr Mark has found the heir somewhere.'

'And this hypochondriac did not tell me anything.'

'He had no chance. You were showing him the dog.'

'Irene Orwid!' muttered Witold, thoughtfully. 'Poswicie has gone! Mark was not worth anything without that. It's too bad! But she—what a splendid party for matrimony! H'm! h'm! it would not be bad at all. I must be going home.'

Humming and speaking to himself by turns he went into the street. The Jew left him and was thoughtful.

'Their oak grove is worth a great deal, the river is very near. That chap will sell it almost for nothing, only I must make haste for it is a crooked business. When his elder brother learns this everything will be lost.'

In the meantime Miss Orwid rang the bell. A waiter appeared.

'Ask Mr Certwan to come and see me,' ordered she.

'Which Mr Certwan? There are three of them staying in the hotel.'

'Three!' she exclaimed in surprise, and added, 'then ask Mr Marwitz to come.'

Her escort appeared immediately.

'Clarke, do you remember Mr Certwan's Christian name? There are three of them in the hotel.'

'His name is Mark. I see I was useful. Three Certwans! But if all are like Mark, I congratulate the country. He must work splendidly.'

'Did you like him?'

'I always like what you like,' answered he.

'Mutual honour, my dear. Will you go with me to that lawyer?'

'Only if such is your wish. I should like to have a nap. You have a better companion.'

'Sleep then. I see I have taken advantage of your good nature. Thank you very much.'

They stood opposite each other. While pronouncing the last words she put out her hands towards him. He took them and pressed them gently, as if he were holding some fragile object.

At that moment Mark entered, glanced and withdrew. He had not expected to see such a tender scene.

Marwitz's part in that long journey had been problematic; now he understood.

'They are engaged,' passed through his head, and immediately a gloomy shadow covered his face.

'A stranger will take Poswicie, will sell it and return to America. The land and the work of two generations will be lost . . .'

Fortune stung him in what he loved the best.

He looked gloomily on the American. He seemed to him at that moment a criminal. He was going to steal a piece of land from Zmudz. There was not a worse crime to Mark. He would torture him for that.

CHAPTER VI

SPRING was in all its splendour. The lilacs were in bloom. The air was breathing with the warm and cooling breath of Nature.

Towards the evening of a long day in May a carriage rolled swiftly along the highway, carrying the heiress, from beyond the seas, home to her patrimony.

The fat horses were covered with foam; they were hurrying to reach home before dusk. Irene looked inquisitively at the country in which her forefathers used to live; beside her sat Marwitz.

'Nature has given what she could,' said he, 'but the people have given nothing beyond what is absolutely necessary. It is quite different in our country.'

'How far is it to Poswicie?' the young girl asked the grey-haired coachman.

He turned his wrinkled face, expressive of a vain desire to understand, and looked on the footman, who was as old as himself.

'Do you understand?'

'No, I don't,' replied the footman.

They approached Poswicie. The poplars

and trees of the park predominated over the houses; everything was fresh and green, as though dressed in Sunday clothes for the reception of the heiress.

'Certwan is waiting for us impatiently,' remarked Irene.

'Yes. The old lawyer told me that his father almost forced him to undertake the administration. He told him to work and wait ten years.'

'Whilst in Kowno he wanted to render the accounts.' She smiled. 'It was difficult to induce him to remain a little longer. Look how beautiful this *château* is. Maybe it's Poswicie.'

'Probably, for we have turned into a worse side road. It reminds me of our wilderness twenty years ago.'

The same moment the footman and coachman turned to the young lady and raised their hats.

'Poswicie!' they said, smiling.

The girl stood up in the carriage; she was smiling and blushing from emotion. Her quick breathing unclosed her coral-like lips, the evening breeze ruffled her hair, golden sparks were in her dark eyes. She was trembling.

The wide-open gate was decorated with green, the courtyard was crowded with people from the village; in front stood the servants in their best clothes; the old land-steward, Sawgard, who still remembered her

grandfather, held a silver tray bearing a loaf of rye bread and some salt.

The carriage stopped. The crowd moved like a wave and rushed forward with a muffled murmur. The girl's eyes filled with tears; for the first time in her life she lost control over herself. Sawgard approached the carriage, uncovered his white head and bent to her knees.

Irene stepped aside and jumped from the carriage. She glanced at the crowd who welcomed her so cordially to the house of her ancestors, and she was in despair, being unable to understand or thank them.

'I can't tell them how thankful I am,' she whispered pitifully, as she listened to the speech of the old land-steward.

At that moment someone came up behind her. She turned. It was Mark. He also stood with uncovered head. He had dressed carefully, as though he considered himself one of her servants, and welcomed her with a profound bow.

She breathed more easily on seeing someone she already knew, and extended her hands towards him, saying,—

'Pray, thank them on my behalf. Thank them very heartily. Tell them that I shall never forget this reception.'

He began to speak in his sonorous voice. The crowd listened and then answered with a shout.

'What do they say?' asked she.

'They ask you to remain with them for ever.'

'I will remain. Tell them so.'

Old Sawgard advanced a step and said,—

'Pray tell her she must love us as her ancestors did.'

Mark translated his words. The girl looked at the old servant through her tears, then put her arms round his neck and embraced him heartily.

The old man handed Mark the tray with the bread and fell at her feet; the crowd rushed forward with enthusiasm and began to press round her. The ice was broken; in the distance the village band began to play, the villagers laughed and cried by turns, they kissed her hands and wanted to carry her into the *château.* Irene was nearly fainting from emotion; she looked at Mark for help.

He understood, spoke a few words, and immediately the crowd stepped aside, leaving a clear passage to the *château.* The girl put her arm within that of the giant and they walked slowly to the house, accompanied by exclamations.

Half-way there, Certwan remembered Marwitz and looked round for him. The American had escaped the ovation. Being fond of peace, he had tried to find it in the *château.* He wished to enter, but at the

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threshold he met deaf Filomen, who, stiff in his old-fashioned livery, was holding a bunch of keys on a cushion. He was taking his part of chamberlain seriously. He had to let the heiress be the first to enter the *château* which he had watched for twenty years, and no one else.

'Open the door!' shouted someone in a thundering voice. He was as afraid as though someone had told him to commit a mortal sin.

'The master, on going away, locked it and said, "You will open it only to the Orwids,"' said he, with toothless mouth, adding, 'And Certwan said the same. The lady will open it; the stranger must wait.'

Marwitz was obliged to wait, looking with interest on the peasant customs, on the servants' livery, on the crowd in the court-yard, and on the young couple slowly approaching the *château*.

Never yet had he seen Irene so excited; she seemed to him taller and prouder, and very happy.

'I would that my father could see her now! He would be so pleased,' thought he, smiling with satisfaction.

Filomen advanced a few steps, like a mummy under the influence of an electric current. His nose grew more red and his eyes shone; he had lived long enough to receive the Orwids.

'He was your grandfather's servant,' whispered Mark. 'Make him happy and open the door.'

She took the keys. The lock grated. Mark opened the door.

'May God grant you, in the house of your ancestors, their virtues and happiness,' said he.

'May I enter now?' Marwitz asked the old servant.

'He is deaf,' said Mark.

'Clarke, you here. Come!' called Irene.

'I am glad you remember my existence.'

'Excuse me, my dear, but I am so excited. Mr Certwan, I should like to entertain these people in some way.'

'I knew it. There is plenty of food and drink prepared for them. You had better think about yourself, you must rest.'

'Thank you for coming. I thought I should cry with regret at being a stranger here, and with the emotion of such a sight. How happy I am, and how grateful to you!'

'I only fulfil my duty.'

'Irene, the European air makes a strange impression on you,' rejoined Marwitz, slowly taking off his overcoat and handing it to Filomen. 'In our country you were always strong, healthy and quiet. What original furniture!'

'That's true! Mr Certwan, be so kind as to show me my house.'

'A groom came for you from Jurgisk, sir,'

said Filomen, in a voice which he intended to be confidential, but which sounded like someone shouting in the forest. 'The old lady is very ill, and the young lady asks you to come.'

Mark grew uneasy. He thought for a while and turned to Miss Orwid.

'I must go for a couple of hours. Pray excuse me. I am called to see a sick person.'

She looked inquisitive and displeased.

'Does the person belong to your family?' asked she.

'No, madame.'

'What was it the old servant said to you?'

'An old lady—a widow—our neighbour is very ill and has called me to her.'

'Return soon. I could not get along here without an interpreter. I shall wait dinner for you.'

'Better not, I may stay longer than I propose. I may only return during the night.'

'How merciful you are!'

'I wonder if that widow lives alone?' said Marwitz, suspiciously.

Mark did not reply, he bowed and went out. In the courtyard the music was playing and the crowd was merry-making. The newcomers visited the house and wondered.

For twenty years the masters had not lived here, and everything looked as if they had left yesterday. Evidently a friendly hand had taken care of it.

Having finished his inspection, Marwitz said,—

'Irene, do you know the story of King Harold?'

'Leave me without your story,' said she, impatiently.

'It's a pity that you don't care to listen to it. You are angry and consequently not curious. But when you are in a good humour remind me of it and I will tell it to you.'

She smiled.

'Let us suppose that I am already in a good humour. Tell me the story.'

The American seated himself on a chair, lighted a cigar, and caressing his side whiskers, said,—

'King Harold, to try his subjects' honesty, suspended a golden shoulder-piece in a tree. Passing the same road three years later he found it on the same branch.'

'Is that all? To what does your story refer?' asked she, amused.

'Irene, you are a very intelligent and practical young person, but you have one fault: you don't like to reason slowly. Every truth needs an example. I apply my story to the people here, for, judging from the house, they must come from England and be descendants of King Harold's subjects. Is it not true? Perhaps that old man even remembers the legendary shoulder-piece.'

He pointed at Filomen, who appeared on the threshold and announced dinner.

'He must be calling us to the feast,' said Marwitz, rising. 'Well, I shall be glad to taste the bread you promised me in Kowno. It's not worth while to wait for Certwan. Judging by the haste he made, I presume that that blind widow must enjoy his particular favour.'

'I think so too,' she assented, frowning. 'Did you learn anything about him in Kowno from the lawyer?'

'I thought his brother's bride would tell you all his secrets. Have you noticed how pretty the women are here? That Miss Jazwiglo is almost a beauty. If it were not for the bad roads I should have no objection whatever to your country. Irene, you are silent. What are you thinking about so deeply?'

'Naturally about the future, my dear. Only think, what shall we do if Certwan leaves us? And he will leave us for certain.'

'Well, raise his salary. How much does he have a year?'

'I don't know. He has independent means. He worked here because his father commanded him.'

'Then take a German overseer.'

'But they dislike Germans here very much.'

'Then let us learn the language as quickly as possible; in the meanwhile you must rely on servants. Ask Certwan to point out the most honest.'

They ate in silence for a long while. At length the girl shook her head.

'Your father was too good to me. I am ashamed now. I come to the possession of my estate, I have now my own country, and I am discouraged. You are right. I must know the language within a month; meanwhile, I must be patient. You will not leave me soon?'

'I will remain as long as you wish. Perhaps Certwan will remain. Would you not care to look at the dance? It's original.'

They sat at the window in the drawing-room, and looked for a long time at the joyful crowd.

Evening was coming, the dancing ceased, and some secret whispering began; they looked towards the window at which the young lady sat. Evidently they were consulting each other.

Then the scene changed. The band came forward, all uncovered their heads, and from hundreds of voices sounded forth a rustic song.

Having finished the refrain, they bowed to the ground and went towards the gate.

The music played continually; whilst walking, they sang again; beyond the gate the

voices became fainter, but one could still hear them resounding in the quiet evening.

Irene leaned out of the window, listening attentively.

'How simple and how beautiful that song was!' said she.

In the courtyard the servants were clearing the remains of the supper. A few dignified land-stewards came from the farm, sat on the verandah at the right wing of the *château*, smoked their pipes and talked quietly, looking along the road. Being tired, Marwitz asked Filomen, by signs, about his rooms and retired.

After the impressions of the day Irene did not wish to sleep. She sat listening to the rustling of the wind among the leaves. When would she be able to understand this country and its people? When would she feel that she was a Zmudzian?'

About midnight the galloping of a horse roused the watch-dogs and animated the slumbering land-stewards. The horseman was approaching, he rode very quickly; at the gate he dismounted and went to the right wing of the *château*.

Irene recognised Mark by his size and gloomy voice. He gave some short orders; the land-stewards replied in a few words, then he asked a few questions and dismissed them.

'Good-night, sir,' they all said.

'Good-night,' answered he.

The key grated in the lock. A light shone forth from a window, then the casement was opened.

Irene waited an hour. The clocks struck one, the light was still there, and when from time to time the wind ceased blowing, the rustling and turning of sheets of paper could be heard through the open window. The dark shadow of a man indicated that Mark was sitting bent at his desk, writing and counting something. Irene arose and went to her chamber.

'A lovely future!' whispered she. 'Then I shall be obliged to work the same way.'

Still Mark worked on. As his father had done before him, so now he was gathering documents, surveys and reports; he was finishing the accounts. He enjoyed the work. To-morrow he would hand this pile of papers to the mistress, take his rifle, whistle for Margas, and return as he came, through Devayta to Sandwile. His service was finished, finished.

Poswicie had cost him over a year of hard work and a bride. Then the people called him a thief. He had had enough of it.

A few hours still remained. He gathered the papers together, put some clothes in a bag, examined his rifle, caressed his dog and blew out the candle.

The morning dawn was lighting the tops of the trees.

When Irene Orwid woke up it was already towards noon. For a moment she did not know where she was.

It was the chamber of her ancestors; it was large and dark because of the Gobelins covering its walls. The linden trees from the park were peeping in through the windows. The girl stretched herself on the gigantic curtained bed and rang the bell.

A chambermaid stepped in quietly. She was a grand-daughter of the respectable Filomen. She handed her mistress a book. The girl opened it and smiled joyfully. It was a book of German and Polish conversations—a true Ariadne's thread.

With the help of the book she could make herself understood. She learnt that the servant's name was Justka, that it was beautiful weather, that Mark was already talking with Marwitz, and that it was Mark who had sent her the book.

'How ingenious! He must have been bored by being interpreter. Well, I am ready.'

In the meantime the two gentlemen were talking in the drawing-room. Mark was listening with interest to Marwitz's narrative of Irene and himself.

'When my father was young he had a farm in a half wild part of America. He did some business selling cattle and skins. He married the only daughter of a settler who lived in

the neighbourhood, and besides me had two older sons. When I was born our state was quite changed. The forests were cut, the Indians retreated, villages and factories were rising with great rapidity.

'Iron and copper mines were discovered, the land was very fertile. A city grew up round our farm, like mushrooms after rain—they called it Drake City, from my mother's name. I remember when it had only one shop, one church and one school. Now it has sixty thousand inhabitants, several churches, ten schools, fifteen factories and several hundred shops. And all this was done in about twenty years. Ten years more and it will be as large as Chicago!'

The American paused and looked proudly at his listener.

'They let you grow,' muttered Mark.

'My father understood that the future of the settlement would be brilliant, and purchased a large tract of land almost for nothing, then he sold half of it, gaining five hundred per cent. The other half he kept. He purchased a copper mine for my oldest brother, married him, and he has settled down. My second brother did not wish to stay at home, and he became a marine officer. I was given a technical education and capital. I have started a cotton mill. Father has remained on the farm; mother died a long time ago, when I was born. Such is our history.'

'And Miss Orwid?' asked Mark.

'Hers is also an old story. I was twelve years old when a very miserable and wounded man came to our farm asking for work; he was in rags, and had with him a four-year-old girl almost dead from fatigue and hunger. They came from the West and they stood a long time at our gate for no one could believe that that miserable man could do any work whatever. At last my father noticed him, and moved by pity received him, mostly for the child's sake, for he was very fond of children.

'The man worked with negroes and Chinamen. He was obedient and quiet, and worked with all the strength of his weak body.

'He was forgotten in the crowd. He lived in a shanty with his child.'

At that moment Irene Orwid laid her hand on Marwitz's shoulder and said,—

'Clarke, let me finish the story. You would conceal a great deal of it.'

She sat between them and spoke with emotion.

'That bad workman lived in a shanty, his food was bad, he was covered with rags, but he saved money and put it in a chink of the wall. He taught his child the Lord's prayer in a foreign language, and lulled her to sleep by promising her that soon they would go beyond the seas—to mother who was waiting

for them. He said that his country was beautiful, and that he had a large farm and a good old friend. The child remembered everything. He worked for two years, then one day he put his hand into the chink in which he hid his money for the travelling expenses—and found nothing. Someone had discovered the hiding-place and robbed the poor man whilst he was absent.

'After that he became entirely discouraged. His cup of bitterness was full; he could work no longer, he looked at the child with despair and wept.

'He lay in the shanty a couple of weeks; the child was hungry. They would both have died had it not been for Mr Marwitz, or rather for Clarke, who once by accident looked into the shanty and called his father. The sick man and the girl were taken into his house; they gave the child some food, and called in a physician for the father. They did everything they could to save his life. But it was too late! The forces of Nature were exhausted as the oil in a lamp. A few days later he died. Before his death he ripped some yellowish papers and a pinch of sand out of his rags. He gave the child a gold medallion and the half of a sealing ring, and told her, when she became of age, to go eastward, beyond the seas, to her mother. He spoke with Mr Marwitz and entrusted him with the child and the papers. When he

died a priest buried him and they threw the dust into his grave.'

She was silent a while and looked at the window, biting her lips, perhaps to keep from crying.

Mark looked at her constantly. He was greatly impressed by the story.

The wrecked man did not reach his country. They threw a pinch of Zmudzian earth, like a relic, on his coffin, and the child remained alone and wept.

There was a great pain in the gloomy man's heart. An unknown and great pain was reflected in his face and coloured his burnt skin with a dark flush. He hung his head.

Clarke Marwitz folded his arms and rocked himself; he brought them both to equilibrium by his quiet, calm voice.

'All this misfortune wouldn't have happened had there been such a woman on our farm as several years later Irene became.'

The girl, awakened from her thoughts, shook her head and said,—

'There is no remedy for the misfortunes imagined by you, Clarke. My father had thousands here at his disposal, and he was buried at Mr Marwitz's expense; Mr Marwitz has brought me up at his own expense.'

'Irene, you are talking nonsense,' interrupted the American. 'I must tell you about that, Mr Certwan. We had not a girl in our

house. My father had nobody to pet and caress; I had no sister to play with. Our house was brighter when we had her.'

'You could have had some relation. It's not true! You did me a favour. They cared for me as though I were their own, they sent me to school, they have never been angry with me.'

'There was no reason for it, you were so useful. You brought a certificate from school, you studied book-keeping in the factory, then you practised in a hospital as a nurse. In doing all that you never thought about yourself, for you returned to our farm, to my old father, and became a second Providence.'

'Clarke, you are talking nonsense,' said she, repeating his own words; then rising, she added, 'Let us go to breakfast.'

'Wait. You have not told yet how you gathered the workmen's children together and taught them, how you took care of the sick people and were my father's secretary . . .'

'My duty was to work. Enough of this talk.'

'Not at all! You have not told that you would not marry William Jackson, a millionaire, because you did not wish to leave my father.'

'My dear, I might have had some personal reasons, therefore there was neither merit nor sacrifice in my acting thus.'

'So I thought, and the next day I proposed to you. I was so sure you would accept me

that I even had the engagement ring in my pocket.'

She laughed heartily.

'You couldn't imagine that I might be in love with someone else?'

'Had existed such a man I would have killed him. But I had not even that consolation.'

'You had your freedom and the ring. You soon consoled yourself.'

'Naturally! I could neither cry nor hang myself. It would have been of no use. Besides, at that time I was awfully busy with a new spinning machine. Do you remember? I even mentioned it to you when I proposed.'

Marwitz lifted his pale eyes and sighed.

Miss Orwid laughed and left the room.

'I ask you to be our judge,' said Marwitz, turning to Mark. 'Is it not logical? My father wished to keep her, she wished to remain. The best way was to unite herself with the family. My father loves her dearly, and I was so sure of marrying her that I never spoke to any other girl. Why lose time? We knew each other very well, we never quarrelled, consequently I bought a ring. And do you know why she refused to marry me? That she might not be suspected of interested motives. No, and no! A whole hour I tried to persuade her. I asked my father and my sister-in-law to help me, but we could do nothing. Tell me, please, isn't such a lack of logic shameful?'

'Had I been in Miss Orwid's place I would not have acted differently,' said Mark. 'She was poor, consequently proud and suspicious. Perhaps now she would give you a different answer.'

'Not at all. Father sent me with her purposely. We are now equally rich. But just the same she doesn't want me. I always keep the ring in my pocket, but I believe I shall give it to another girl, for notwithstanding all her education and common sense she is awfully illogical.'

He was silent and rocked himself again, caressing his side whiskers. He looked sorrowful, as though his spinning machine did not work well.

'Why did you not take steps to recover the inheritance earlier?' asked Mark, after a moment's silence.

'We had no documents, beside baptism certificates. Kazimiez Orwid just wanted to return to his country when death prevented him from doing so. He told my father who he was, and he named Mr Certwan. When he died all steps were neglected. Later, my father did not wish to part with his pet, and postponed the matter from day to day. An accident changed everything.

'Irene read your name, which she remembered, in a newspaper. She prevailed on my father to write to Paris. That lady studying in the Sorbonne—is she your sister?'

'Step-sister.'

'Have you had your breakfast?' said Irene, appearing on the threshold of the dining-room.

'Yes, thank you,' said Mark, rising.

Then he remembered why he had come.

Clarke began very systematically to pick up a cigar. Certwan approached the young mistress.

'I have brought the books,' said he, speaking with difficulty. 'Maybe you would kindly look through them and release me.'

'Could you not remain?' said she, with a prayer in her voice.

'I can't. I have too much to do.'

'Are you not satisfied with your salary?'

'We have not served here for money,' he replied, raising his head proudly. 'Father did it for his friend, I for father. Besides, you can find plenty of administrators. I can recommend you an honest man; the *employées* and servants are old and trustworthy; there are no entanglements; order has been established here for twenty years.'

'But, Mr Certwan, I don't know the language, the customs, the law. I don't need an administrator, I need a friend. You must promise me your help, at least in the beginning.'

'I will come any time you like to call me.'

'Come at least twice a week.'

'I will come any time you call me. My

farm is not far away; it is on the other side of the Dubissa.'

'I thank you even for that. Is it a great favour and sacrifice?'

She looked at him attentively, but he did not raise his eyes, and said, in a low voice,—

'No, madam. It is not a sacrifice.'

She turned away, impatient at his stonelike coldness. This stone, did he not love anything except his country?

'How much of your time will you give me?'

'Until evening, We shall be able to finish the accounts by then.'

'And then?'

'I shall return to my farm.'

'Mr Certwan, have pity on me!' she cried. 'I came yesterday, and except the courtyard I have not yet seen anything. I know as much about my estate as about the interior of Africa. Could you not show me my farms and my forests? Our fathers were good friends; for the sake of their memory, I beg you to give me a little of your friendship. I have no one in this country to whom I belong.'

Her voice had a charming, soft sound, and her dark eyes were sad.

Their looks met. His severe features softened, he blushed. He ought not to have looked, for his determination vanished.

'I will remain as long as I am able,' answered he.

It was her first victory. She breathed.

When Marwitz had finished his cigar he found them in the study, sitting at a table strewn with papers. He seated himself in an arm-chair, and, for an hour, listened quietly to an agronomico - administrative lecture, but, bored at length, he rose intending to go to the park.

'Mr Certwan,' said he, 'do you think the gardener will understand me?'

'I don't think so. What do you want?'

'I saw a river and I suppose it must contain some fish. I would like to have some bait. It's the best way of passing the time. Chance and observation! I brought a rod and line with me. Irene, you are laughing; you always look on my tastes from the humoristic side.'

'The idea of bringing a rod and line from America! That is indeed chance and observation. Would it be worse if I were to cry over your taste?'

Mark called a servant and recommended the angler to his care. Miss Orwid was amused by the episode. The giant did not say a word.

'Don't you ever laugh?' she asked.

He bent over the papers.

'Never!' muttered he, indistinctly.

'Are you not married?'

'No.'

'Then are you a widower?'

'Why?' asked he, raising his astonished eyes.

'Because you have a wedding ring.'

'It's my mother's.'

'Ah! you have lost your mother. Was it a long time ago?'

'Very.'

'That's why you are so gloomy. And you have not a bride?'

He shook his head negatively.

'No brothers and sisters?'

'Only a step-brother and a step-sister.'

'Then you must be lonesome.'

'Like everyone I have some sorrows and some pleasures. Have you looked at this survey of the farm Gilus? There are a thousand English sheep there.'

Again they were absorbed in the work. She listened to him attentively, seriously, made notes and asked many details. After two hours she became pale; her eyes were shining feverishly. She was tired but she worked on just the same, only several times she pressed her temples. She had a headache.

Strange thing! Although absorbed by figures he noticed and understood that movement.

He hesitated, and then stopped working.

'What next?' asked she; 'let us finish that account.'

'Could we not finish it to-morrow? You are tired already.'

'No matter. I must take advantage of your time and kindness. I will rest then.'

'We will finish to-morrow,' he repeated, rising.

'Very well, then, if that is your wish. Let us go and see the angler.'

'We can visit one farm to-day—the nearest.'

'Ah! with pleasure. Thank you.'

She looked at him charmingly and they went into the garden. The park extended to the river, and, like everything else, was very carefully kept. Marwitz was sitting on the rocky banks of Dubissa, looking, with the patience of a Chinese bonze, on a piece of cork that floated on the water. In a vase beside him were already a few small fish.

He did not turn, although he heard their steps.

'How is your chance and observation?' asked the hostess, mischievously.

He made an impatient movement.

'Irene, don't you know that fish are afraid of a noise? I have told you that so many times. You have scared a fish. For five minutes it has been swimming round the bait. Now it's gone and will not come back.'

He pulled out his line and threw it on the ground.

Irene shrugged her shoulders and looked with interest on the country. To the left the river Ejnia rushed noisily along, moving the wheels of a water-mill; to the right could

be seen Skomont, the red roof of a church, the pear trees surrounding the vicarage, and a long line of villages.

Straight ahead stood a quiet oak grove—it was peaceful, gilded by the sun, and looking into the grey waves of the river Dubissa.

Several boats floated past laden with fresh hay and fish; in the fields men were following the ploughs.

The picture was charming, quiet and very serene. Even Marwitz looked at it and said,—

'Irene, I like your country. This sight pays for the bad roads.'

'Yes, it's pretty,' said she, smiling, 'only too quiet. See how slowly this people move, how slowly they work, and they are silent. Compare that with the bustle of our farm.'

'I think the people must be lazy, not very intelligent and gloomy. It's no wonder they complain of being poor.'

Mark looked at the oak grove and listened attentively. Notwithstanding the splash of the Dubissa, and the distance, its rustling caressed his ears, it whispered something to him and greeted him. Marwitz's speech interrupted this mysterious conversation; he looked at the American and began with muffled voice and ever-increasing animation.

'You are mistaken. Our people, apparently so slow and gloomy, work like ants, and they have noble hearts. It's true they

are silent, but that is not because they don't like to talk, or because they are unthinking; it is because they are not permitted to talk, and because they have no time. In those villages you will find neither tap-houses nor dissipation; that quiet is better than noise. We work slowly, but continually, and as much as we can.'

'Excuse my superficial judgment,' said Marwitz. 'I took that from Irene; she also judges quickly. Now I shall do as you do —keep silent and observe.'

The girl looked at them both.

'Don't try to put your own sins on me,' said she; 'better say frankly that to you there is no country but America, and no salvation beyond the Anglican Church! You have told it to me so many times.'

'All true, except about the Church. I am not a *dévot*. Above all things I like peace.'

'We know all about that. What is that mansion yonder?' asked she, turning to Mark.

'That is Skomont,' answered he, slowly.

'Does it belong to that widow whom you visited yesterday?'

'No, madam, it was my father's estate.'

'Then it's yours. And that church?'

'That is our parish church.'

'Then you live in Skomont?'

'No, madam, I live beyond that oak grove.'

'And whose property is that oak grove?'

'Mine,' said he, with an expression of joy in his sombre eyes.

'Are there any wild beasts there?' asked Marwitz.

'Do you mean game?'

'Well, yes—boars, hyenas?'

'No, we have no wild animals,' answered Mark, quietly.

Miss Orwid sat on the bank of the river, and looking at the country, asked,—

'And that widow—is she well?'

'Why should she care about a strange woman?' thought Mark.

'Yes, she is well,' was his short answer.

At that moment the groom came and told them the carriage was ready. They were going to see one of the farms.

Marwitz remained. He threw the line into the water and looked at the cork with half-closed eyes. The warm weather and the quiet made him drowsy, and he slumbered. He dreamt of his farm, the cotton machinery, and the puddings prepared with Irene's white hands. He smiled, and in the meantime the fish ate the bait and departed.

He had plenty of time for fishing. Irene did not need him at all. From morning till evening she was busy visiting her estate; she looked into every detail, and when she returned home she listened to Mark's explanations, and studied her ancestors' language.

Usually they sat on the verandah overlooking the park, he bent and looking on the ground, she surrounded with dictionaries and grammars. He did not speak again about his departure, and in the meantime he prepared her for her duties.

They visited forests, farms, water-mills, everything; the servants came to her for orders; she already understood many words. A week passed and yet he was not anxious to go and work for himself—to become free. He sat beside her as though enchanted, and was silent.

One evening they were all three sitting on the banks of the Dubissa. Marwitz had his fishing-line, Irene was trying to learn some expression full of consonants, Mark lay on the ground looking on the oak grove.

Suddenly a small boat came out from behind the trees and, guided by the sure hand of the boatman, glided swiftly towards Poswicie. As it passed the region of shadow cast by the trees the last rays of the setting sun lit up Lukas Gral's swarthy and sad face.

Certwan rose and there was an expression of constraint on his face. It was the first time in his life that anyone had come to remind him that it was time to work.

Gral noticed him and directed the boat towards the bank, embarrassed by the presence of a stranger and by the elegant

people in whose company he found his friend.

He raised his hat slightly.

'Did you come for me?' Mark asked.

'Excuse me. I waited two weeks. Perhaps you have no time?'

'Have you rented the lake?'

'I did as you told me. The lake is ours, but you didn't give me any orders about the fishing, and there are plenty of merchants for fish. I went for advice to our god-father. He wanted to come after you, but he is not well, so I came. There is no rye in the mills in Jurgisk; they stopped last Thursday. Your younger brother asked after you three times. Miss Hanka came yesterday with the curate's niece, and they also need you. But the worst thing is the fish, for now they pay a good price for it. We wait for you as for the sun.'

Irene listened attentively to this conversation. Sometimes she understood a word here and there, the rest she guessed.

'You are going to leave us?' said she, sorrowfully. He was silent for a second, then without looking at her answered, in his gloomy way,—

'Any time you need me I will come. Now I must be going.'

'Immediately?'

'Yes.'

He bowed to her profoundly.

'Then good-bye. Thank you for everything you have done for me.'

At that moment a silver fish was not far from the bait, but notwithstanding, Marwitz pulled out the line and shook hands with Certwan.

'I expect to see you again soon,' said he, cordially.

The young girl looked at Mark attentively.

'We must shake hands too, in American fashion,' and she smiled.

His broad, sunburnt, hard hand seized her delicate hand, and the gigantic man bent before her with respect. She must have been very sure of her ground, for she said to that stern man, with a light of coquettishness in her eyes, 'Well, you may kiss it.'

He bent still lower and silently availed himself of the permission. When he straightened himself a deep flush covered his cheeks; he avoided her eyes.

He did not say anything further, but bowing once more, glided down the precipitous bank straight into the boat. Lukas handed him an oar. They were off.

The sun's rays reddened the waves of the Dubissa. The boat, the water, the tops of the oaks, the boatmen, all were red. One of them, small and bent, sat gazing into the water, the other, with head erect, like a strong, well-grown oak, paid no attention to the stream and whirlpools of the river.

The oar bent in his strong hands, his figure swayed rhythmically, without effort.

He looked at his oaks and listened indifferently to Gral's complaints.

'A week back Woynat drove us from his house. He broke our crockery, threw out our clothes and boxes, and drove Martha from him. Such is my fate. The next day I returned from the lake and took the poor thing into my own house. Now she cries continually and doesn't care to speak. Am I guilty of all that?'

At that moment a melodious, unknown song resounded from the direction of Poswicie. It was sung first by one voice, then by two, then by only one, that of a woman. Mark turned. Irene Orwid was standing on the bank, leaning against the twisted trunk of an old willow. The flexible branches surrounded her head like a frame, the sun lit up the picture.

The young man stood for a moment looking at her and holding his oar, then something like anger appeared in his eyes; he plunged his oar in the water, frowned, and looked no more. The boat entered in the shadow of the oaks, and nothing more could be seen of the other side of the river. The glare on the river began to fade, the song ceased.

On both banks there was quiet, undisturbed by anything; only old Devaytis listened to the news carried along by the Dubissa and rustled majestically.

Beneath its shadows a solitary man stood for a long time ; when he left there were plenty of stars in the sky, and now the first cock's crow was heard in the village. The oak wished him good-bye with a long rustle, and the small oaks repeated good-bye after the patriarch in a muffled chorus.

CHAPTER VII

'MISS ANETA!'

'What is it?'

'When will you have finished with those mean insects?'

'You mustn't speak in that way of honest bees. They set an example of industry, as does our Mark; they praise God by singing while they work; they build palaces such as an architect could not; they give white wax for the church candles, and honey, which is good for many ailments.'

'May the wood-peckers pick those stinging flies!'

'That's a slander on them. They don't sting. They defend their bee-hives until death. They don't touch the person who loves them and respects them. I have set three swarms in the bee-hives and not one of them has stung me.'

'You smear yourself with something secretly and they don't bother you. But neither we nor the cattle can hide from them. They stung Mark the day before yesterday and the colt to-day. Grenis is

swollen like a barrel, and they have bitten me in the cheeks. God's punishment be on them.'

'I will give you some ointment, it will help you at once.'

'You had better give the ointment to your bees so that they may become less ferocious. They are flying all around. I will settle them.'

'Pray don't! I have sown white clover and balm-mint for them; they will soon be quiet. Three bee-hives are nothing. It's only a beginning. I have found another swarm in the oak grove.'

'What? One more? And the forest bees are the most ferocious. I suppose you propose taking Grenis to help you, and the van, and horse, and a ladder.'

'It's the last time. I would go alone, but they have settled very high up and I am very old. If Mark were here he would help me.'

'Yes, he has plenty of time to smoke out bees. Grenis, hitch the grey mare. But if it is not the last time, then I give you my word as a soldier that I will stuff up the holes in the bee-hives and let them die.'

'It shall be the last time, for there is no room for more. But we shall have honey and wax for our trouble.'

'Ho, ho! You have found my weak point. It's understood. There will be as much profit from this bother as a cat would cry, I

know it. Only return soon, for Hanka and black Julka will come to see us in the afternoon.'

'I will be back in an hour. Thank you for the horse.'

Grenis was ready with the van. The old woman put into it a sieve, a sack, a sprinkling brush, and other things necessary for keeping bees, then she got into the van and departed.

Rymko Ragis remained on the bench in front of the house, smoking his pipe, and looking round with his merry eyes.

It was Saturday morning. The people were scattered about the fields. From the next house old Woynat was heard coughing heavily and scolding the farm boy.

No one was quarrelling in Mark's farm except the young storks on the top of the barn, who were waiting for food. The beautiful weather, the sun and an abundance of necessaries had disposed the inhabitants to be quiet. The fox was slumbering near the house, the grey crane was catching flies on the wall, the red squirrel was chasing its own tail; from time to time a rabbit's ears appeared from under the hedge; the doves, like a white cloud, flew down near the well, and then sat on the roof cooing in unison; the dogs were warming themselves in the sun.

Everything was quiet and satisfied with its lot; even the blackbird in the cage was singing joyfully, whilst the starling cried, as loudly as it could,—

'Your health! Good morning!'

Ragis twisted his moustache, caressed his brush-like hair, then filled another pipe and began to hum,—

'Not saying a word to mother,
Tari, tari, tari,
Phillis went to the garden,
Tari, tari, tari.'

As though in contrast, there sounded in the street first a whistle then a song from a German opera:—

'Beim Weine, beim Weine, da sitzt man gern zu drei,
Beim Liebchen, beim Liebchen, da sitz man drei allein!'

Then the noise of a horse's hoofs resounded, and behind the gate Witold appeared on horseback, dressed as though he were going to a hunting-party at Windsor Castle.

'Hey! Is there anyone here?' cried he.

Ragis closed his eyes and pretended to be sleepy, even the dogs did not move; only the squirrel and the rabbits ran into the garden, frightened by the unusual noise.

'*Verflucht, verdamnt!*' muttered the young dandy. 'Are they dead? Hey, Mark! open the gate; if not, I will break it.'

As though awakened by the threat, the dogs rushed out howling; then Ragis opened one eye and, having spat slowly, said to the dogs,—

'Hush! Lie down! Quiet!'

'Shut up! To the deuce with you! Are you Rymko Ragis?'

'Yes,' mumbled the old man, without moving from his place.

'Is Mark at home?'

'No,' was the answer, pronounced in the same way.

The young man's pretty face began to tremble nervously. He grew homely.

'How many times must I come here to see him? Is it a joke? Is he never at home?'

'He has no home,' answered Ragis, slowly.

'That's not my concern. I am here for the last time, and for the last time I ask Mark to come and see me on business. You won't see me any more here.'

'Well, we can bear that punishment also,' said Ragis, smiling ironically.

Witold became enraged.

'Tell him to call at Skomont within three days, to sign the agreement for the division of the estate, according to father's will, and to return me the draughts which he has appropriated. Do you understand? I give him three days. Should he not come I will force him. Let him mark that!'

'We will mark every word of yours. It's understood. Ho, ho! I see you are very badly in need of money. Well, well, a little patience! Mark shall not keep the money for himself. He shall bring it.'

'I don't need his unclean money. Let him return what he has grabbed from me; if not, I will teach him how to be honest.'

'Don't you leave anything for me?'

'You should have a lesson how to speak seriously. Your stupid jokes are out of place.'

'And stupid threats also.'

'We shall see how this swindling ends.'

'Yes, we shall see, and in the meantime your arrogance must be stopped, you droll,' said Rymko, loudly, rising from the bench.

At his voice and movement his army of dogs was ready for a fight and barked threateningly. The old man seized a stick and went towards the gate.

'Return home, you milk-sop! There is no room here for scoundrels. And keep your tongue quiet, or you may regret having spoken too much. Get out!'

From the height of his charger Witold looked boldly on the cripple, pressed his horse-whip more tightly, and biting his lips, chewed some oaths.

Ragis reached the gate and opened it; the dogs looked into his eyes.

'Get out!' he repeated still louder.

'Don't scream, old man,' answered the youth, smiling ironically. 'I care as much about you as about your wooden leg.'

'Get out!' shouted the cripple.

The dogs rushed forward as though they had been told to do so. Three of them

rushed to the horse's nostrils and two to his legs. One of them seized the rider's boot. There was a fearful noise. The horse began to kick, plunge and snort. Witold's horse-whip, instead of driving off the dogs, excited the horse, who champed his bit and rushed into the street. After a few minutes, one dog, out of breath, brought Ragis a dusty cap; another furnished a torn glove; two returned lame and whimpering pitifully; finally the last appeared, bringing the most important trophy—the horse-whip.

The brilliant cavalier had disappeared, and only a cloud of dust remained.

The dogs, greatly surprised, circled round their master, looking at his hands. They could not understand why, after hunting such a beast, they did not get either entrails or legs. Ragis, in a rage, did not even look at his favourites.

Peace and quiet had deserted the farm. Only a very unpleasant impression remained.

At that moment Woynat's farm boy looked through the hedge and said, in a frightened voice,—

'The master wants Mr Mark to come and see him.'

'Not at home,' answered Ragis, roughly.

'Then what will become of him?' moaned the man. 'I think he will die soon.'

'Woynat? What is the matter with him?'

'I don't know. He has gone to bed and

he speaks very kindly. It must be before death, sir.'

'Tell him that when Mark returns I will send him in.'

The farm boy left, but this news excited the old man very much. What could the uncle want with his nephew whom he had driven away? Perhaps he was really dying.

But he did not think long. Destiny wished that for that day Mark's house should, like Job's, be the point to which all bad news was to come.

The gate creaked and an elderly peasant entered the courtyard; he was covered with flour, but, despite his age, his figure was straight; he was evidently an old soldier.

He stopped at a certain distance from Ragis and was silent.

'What news, comrade Juchno?' asked the old corporal, caressing his moustachios.

'I come with a report from the water-mill. Last night the water carried away a wheel.'

'And where were you that you didn't watch? Have you been sleeping?'

'Yes, I have. I was permitted to sleep three hours after midnight. When I woke up the wheel was gone. I went to search for it and found it near Grynisk. The peasants had caught it. They want to be paid.'

'What a story! The wheel is worth a couple of hundred roubles. And I told you—"with a water-mill, as with a scout,

Dubissa is a mischievous enemy." And she has done mischief.'

'The noise makes one so tired that one sleeps like a log. The peasants ask thirty roubles. I would have paid them with my own money, but I have sent it to my grandson, who is at school, so I came to ask the master for help.'

'Naturally! To him for help. He was born to help everyone. Ho! ho! that's understood. Everyone is only too glad to put their burden on him. And then they slander him. Go back, old man, or Dubissa will take the rest of the mill. I will send the master to you to-morrow morning.'

Here Ragis, like the priest of an Almighty God, nodded kindly, proud of his position.

'Holy Virgin!' said he, sighing, when the peasant had gone, 'I am glad that I have only a wooden leg in this world.'

He moved his head and interrupted his monologue by humming,—

'"He who has no money, lives happy."

'Mark has something, and what benefit is it to him? He hastens home from the lake as to a wedding. Yes, he shall have a wedding. Witold, Woynat, and Juchno with the wheel! A litany! Before he returns I am sure there will be several more people after him. Oho, my dear wooden leg! I don't have any bother with that.'

The old man smiled, gave a caressing stroke to his wooden leg and then began to listen.

'Oho, Miss Aneta is returning with her flies! My congratulations. They will kiss me without being asked.'

The rattle of the van approached, Ragis rose quickly and went into the house. He stuck his head through the window and said,—

'Have you succeeded?'

'Yes, yes! They came when Grenis smoked them out, poor things! I handed them a branch and they sat on it. The queen sat on my hand—I have her in the cage. Come and see her.'

'No, thank you, I am not anxious to see it. Take them away. Hu! there are so many flying round, I shiver.'

'Is it not shameful for an old soldier to hide from bees?' suddenly asked a strange voice from the meadow.

'And you, girls, are you not ashamed to trample on my grass?' answered he, turning with a smile.

Behind the hedge bordering the kitchen garden stood the two inseparable friends—Julka Nerpalis and Hanka Certwan.

They had been united since childhood by friendship, and by the same aspiration to act and think independently. Julka, being more lively and energetic, was the head of their association. One year of study to-

gether had made them still closer friends. They had become equal by work and perseverance; they had become almost one—one completing the other.

In appearance they were different. One was swarthy, lively, talkative and always joyful—she represented action and the practical side of life; the other was pale, silent and always thoughtful—she was a picture of quiet and deep thought.

At the mention of a trampled meadow fear and confusion appeared in Hanka's eyes. She did not understand joking, for her every word was a holy truth. Julka shook her curly hair challengingly, and answered with ease,—

'You had better look after the sheep which we have driven away from your meadow. We deserve a prize for it.'

Miss Aneta understood Hanka's fear and came to her rescue, having first hung up the swarm of bees.

'Don't listen to him, my dear children. Mr Ragis is joking. Come nearer. Hanka, what herb have you in your hand? Perhaps it's useful?'

'Cynoglossum, aunt. It's used for various ailments!' answered the girl, kissing the old woman's hand.

'Perhaps for rheumatism?' asked Ragis, coming nearer.

'No. One does not use an herb for

rheumatism. The climate is the best thing for that,' answered she, smiling quietly.

'Hanka, don't make any diagnosis. Wait till you have finished your studies,' laughed Julka; then turning to Ragis she asked, 'Is Mr Mark at home?'

'What? You also need him?' he cried.

'Yes, and imperatively. My uncle needs him to disentangle some quarrel about a piece of land belonging to the church. He wants him to come to the vicarage . . .'

'Where do they not want him? But he isn't at home. A week ago he went to Lake Wilajki to the fishery—I expect him back to-day.'

Hanka hesitated, but at length she said quietly,—

'I should like to see him too. Mother—'

'I know, I know,' interrupted Ragis, 'I had the honour to-day of talking with Witold. He is a hero.'

'He is young yet,' said the old woman, defending him as usual.

In the meantime the girls had entered the courtyard and seated themselves on the bench under the window.

Miss Aneta was evidently very sorrowful.

'My dear children, I have nothing to offer you for refreshment,' said she, wringing her hands.

Before they could say a word the gate of the courtyard opened and Gral's beautiful

wife entered. A white kerchief covered her golden hair, her face was slightly sunburnt, and her smart dress made her look still more beautiful.

In one hand she held a quaint large basket covered with leaves; with the other hand she sheltered her eyes, and said,—

'Good afternoon, Miss Aneta! I have brought you some strawberries from the oak grove.'

A great joy brightened the old woman's sorrowful face, but immediately after it was disturbed by some scruples.

'Thank you very much! But why should you give us those berries? It's difficult to pick them. Perhaps you gathered them for your husband?'

'The idea! Does he know what is good?' answered the beautiful woman, making a grimace.

Ragis half closed his eyes cunningly, and said,—

'Is that so? He doesn't know what is good? Naturally! Onion! It's too bad for you that he has no taste at all.'

The young woman laughed, showing her splendid teeth. She put the basket on the bench, and added,—

'The berries belong to the owner of the grove. I picked them with pleasure, for it's very dull staying in the house alone.'

'I heard Woynat is dying,' said Ragis.

Martha's face changed immediately—from smiling it became hard and gloomy.

'Let him die!' said she, through her set teeth.

'He asked after Mark,' muttered the cripple.

'Already? He has had enough of living alone? We shall see whether it's as easy to bring back as it is to drive away. I am sure Mark didn't go.'

'No, for he is not home, otherwise he couldn't have refused a sick man. It would be proper for you to go and see him . . .'

'Even if he were in agony I would not go. He drove us away as though we were dogs, now let the dogs take care of him!'

Her eyes were full of sparks, she blushed. From a beautiful woman she became a true Megæra.

Ragis looked at her and shook his head, but was silent.

'But I think Mark wouldn't go either,' she continued. 'Had he called my husband it would have been quite different. Lukas thinks that he ought to suffer for the sins of the whole world. I am not like that.'

Happily, Miss Aneta had not heard this outburst of wrath, for she would not have dared to accept the berries from such an impetuous woman. But, having pacified her scruples, the old woman had taken the basket and disappeared with it into the house. She

returned when the outburst of anger was over, thanking the young woman heartily for the present.

'Don't mention it,' said Martha, smiling again. 'But I have forgotten to tell you the most important news. In the oak grove Devayta I met the Lords of Poswicie. They came in a boat. The lady is very beautiful and dresses very fashionably; and the gentleman, he must be her husband, is so very homely that one shivers in looking on him.'

'What were they doing there?' asked Ragis.

'They sang, chatted in some foreign language, looked into the caverns and into the well, walked three times round Devaytis, then they perceived me and came to me. They asked me something, it must have been about the oak, for they pointed at it. The lady can speak Polish a little, but I couldn't understand her. Then she looked into a book and asked, "Where is Mr Mark Certwan?" I showed her the path; they saluted and left me. I am sure they will come here.'

'That is good news indeed!' exclaimed Julka. 'I am anxious to see that American girl. Have any of you seen her?'

'No. I asked Mark whether she was beautiful, but naturally he did not answer me,' said Ragis.

'I understand she is very laborious and practical. Witold visited them the day before yesterday,' said Hanka. 'He says she is charming.'

'Ho! ho! ho! Witold can't marry her!'

'Why not?' asked Julka, jokingly.

'Because a laborious and practical woman would not marry him. And then, that homely man is her bridegroom.'

'Holy Virgin!' exclaimed Martha, 'could she not see any better?'

'Ho! ho! ho! I think your eyes were bleared too,' said Ragis, smiling ironically.

The woman blushed.

'Necessity is not paradise,' answered she, confused.

'Readiness is worse than slavery,' sneered the old man, mercilessly.

She turned towards the gate, pulling her kerchief over her eyes.

'Good-bye,' said she, and went out.

'What a beautiful woman!' said Julka, softly. 'I understand Mark was in love with her.'

'God preserve him from such a love!' said the old man, making a grimace.

Miss Aneta appeared on the threshold with a tray full of saucers, a dish of strawberries, and a pitcher of milk; she was followed by Grenis, carrying a table, which he put in front of the bench.

'Here is something to refresh you, my

dear children,' said she, smiling. 'While you eat them I will put the bees in a hive. I mustn't leave them too long in the bag.'

'I will help you, aunt,' said Hanka.

'No, thank you, my dear! Grenis will help me. You eat the berries and rest after your studies.'

Having said this the old woman protected her face with a sieve, and accompanied by the farm boy went into the garden.

The young girls, eating the berries, laughed at her funny attire.

The crane, taking advantage of their distraction, stretched his neck from time to time and put his beak into the dish of strawberries, while the other animals looked on from afar.

'Where is the squirrel?' asked Hanka.

'Squirrel!' cried Ragis.

The red-haired, prankish animal jumped directly on the table from the roof. It sat on its hind legs, lifted its fore-paws, and moving its whiskers, looked at the people with a pair of round, bead-like eyes. Its bushy tail was waving over its head.

'Do you want a nut?' asked Hanka, smiling.

The squirrel turned a masterly somersault, seized the nut and ran with it to the hedge. The fox looked at him inquisitively, and the crane walked about majestically.

'I don't see the hedgehog,' said Hanka. 'Where is he?'

'Hog!' cried Ragis, much pleased. 'During the day-time he sleeps, and during the night he hunts. Ho, ho! I teach him continually, but he is very stubborn and hardened in iniquity. He will end as badly as every good-for-nothing does.'

'It's difficult to change nature,' said Julka, seriously.

Ragis became very enthusiastic, for he was very fond of talking about animals.

'You are right! Animals are like people, only they are better in this respect, that they can't talk, and they don't know anything about money. In other respects they are the same. They are good and bad, quiet and angry, laborious and lazy, honest and thieves, pretty and homely. The vicar scolded me when I told him that in every animal there is some man. He would not let me explain it to him, otherwise he would have believed in it himself. For thirty years I have taken care of different animals and I know them well. There are none better than dogs, and none worse than foxes. Oh, how many times I was obliged to whip my fox before he became better! Is it not so?'

The fox moved his tail, and with the composure of innocence looked askance at the chickens.

During the whole of his life he had been hesitating which to choose—chickens or a whipping.

'Show me the hedgehog, please,' said Julka.

'And me the rabbits,' added Hanka.

'Very well, I must first wake the hedgehog, and then I will show you all my animals.'

Speaking thus, he went into the house and then came out with a flute. Putting it to his mouth he played the old-fashioned song,—

'The moon has disappeared and the dogs sleep . . .'

No one would have believed the effect that was produced by that sentimental melody. In the first place, several children, playing in the street, disappeared like a flight of sparrows after the discharge of a rifle. The farm boy, helping Miss Aneta with bees, shivered; the people, coming back from the fields or sitting in front of their houses, looked round frightened, and withdrew, carefully locking their doors; but in the yard of Mark's farm there was a great commotion.

The rabbits rushed to the feet of the old man, the crane also hastened up; the fox gave up looking at the chickens, the squirrel threw away his nut, and even the hedgehog awoke from his slumbers and rushed out from the house.

All gathered round the great magician and looked intently into his eyes. In addition, the starling cried aloud, and the

blackbird whistled as well as he could the same melody that the old man was playing.

At that moment Miss Irene Orwid and Mr Clarke Marwitz entered the village on foot. They stopped at the first house, and the young lady asked some girls playing in the garden, 'Where lives Mr Mark Certwan?'

The question was asked in Polish-German style, according to the manual of conversation, which must have been the reason the village beauties did not understand it. They looked first at each other, then at the strangers, and then rushed into the cherry-tree thicket like a herd of reindeers.

The Americans walked on, very much surprised at such a proceeding.

After several other vain attempts to find Mark's house, they met a lad, riding a little horse and holding an enormous whip in his hand.

The boy looked from beneath the large brim of his hat on the silver coin which Marwitz showed him, and on the light dress of the beautiful lady; then after a moment's reflection he rushed forward, signifying with a gesture to them to follow him. He stopped in the front of Mark's house, and pointed it out with his whip.

Marwitz handed him the coin.

The boy shook his head.

'No, thank you, sir,' said he, and galloped on.

The American was greatly surprised.

'I should never have found the house,' said Irene. 'He lives like a peasant . . .'

She wished to say something more, but became silent, so great was her surprise at what she saw.

She stood in front of the white-washed house covered with ivy, and beheld a strange sight in the courtyard of the farm. Several animals were fawning on an old man, some of them being seated on his knees, whilst two young girls were looking at them and laughing heartily.

To Irene's mind came legends of hermits of the times of yore. It seemed to her that she saw a picture taken from those holy legends; she forgot where she was. The old man was playing the flute, the bird in the cage was whistling the same melody, and in the courtyard there were snow-white doves, motley rabbits, a fox, a crane and several dogs.

'Have you ever seen anything like that?' whispered Miss Orwid at length.

The American stood motionless, looking not at the animals, but on the people.

'Beautiful!' said he, also in a whisper.

They were able to stand a long time unperceived, for the review of Ragis's army had absorbed both young ladies entirely, and Miss Aneta would not leave the bees for anything; but the dog smelt strangers, and

notwithstanding the music on the flute, they began to turn round. The old man glanced towards the gate, and the instrument slipped from his hand; the charm was broken.

The doves flew away first, and sank like a white cloud on the roof; the rabbits rushed to the house; the squirrel jumped from Ragis's arm and went to search for his nut under the hedge; the dogs looked at the newcomers, followed by the crane, who walked majestically, with the dignity of a court chamberlain.

Irene came nearer, glanced round as though looking for someone, and repeated her question,—

'Does Mr Mark Certwan live here?' Then she thought, 'I am anxious to know what will happen if he is not in, for I cannot say another word in Polish.'

'And the word became flesh,' muttered Ragis. 'It must be Miss Orwid, and Mark is not home.'

Hanka gathered her courage, being naturally first encouraged by Julka's nodding.

'Yes, he lives here,' said she, rising and advancing a few steps.

She would give anything were he here to relieve her from the inquisitive looks of the strangers.

'Is he at home?' said Irene, employing the rest of her vocabulary.

'No, madam.'

This was a heavy blow. Irene thought a while, but could remember no other phrase.

She glanced therefore at Hanka's fashionable dress, on her delicate features and white hands, and risked a great question.

'Do you speak French?' asked she in that language,

The girl could not help smiling.

'Yes, I do,' said she, with pure Parisian accent.

The face of the heiress of Poswicie brightened.

'Thank God!' said she, breathing deeply. 'At last I can be understood. But I will begin by introducing myself. I am Irene Orwid; I come from Poswicie to ask Mr Mark Certwan to help me in a thousand things. Is he not at home?'

'He isn't. But he will be back to-day.'

'He will. . . . Do you know that I am anxious to wait for him here? The whole day long we have been visiting the country on foot, and I am tired.'

Hanka blushed.

'Will you come in?' gabbled she, feeling that she was losing her self-possession more and more, and looking beseechingly at Julka for help.

She was understood. Julka whispered something to Ragis and then came to the rescue with her usual energy.

'We must also begin by an introduction,' said she, gaily. 'This is Mr Mark's sister Hanka, and I am a neighbour. Like you, we came to Mr Mark with a thousand little business affairs, but with this difference, that we have been waiting for him longer.'

'Is it you who study in Paris? You who opened for me the road to my country? Well, you must know, then, that I would have given millions for such a pleasant meeting. I thank you most heartily. . . . You must consider me as your debtor.'

Hanka put her hand in Irene's and said timidly,—

'I am glad I was of some use to you.'

Suddenly Marwitz, who had been silent till now, took his hands from his pockets, raised his hat and manifested his presence by speech.

'Irene, perhaps you will be kind enough to introduce me?'

'With great pleasure! This is Mr Marwitz, a bachelor at your service; his principal characteristic is this—that during his whole life he has never sinned through gallantry. I commend him to your favours.'

The young girls welcomed the stiff American by a silent bow. Julka bit her lips so as not to laugh, Hanka blushed, and she had reason; Mr Marwitz had been looking at her constantly ever since he entered the courtyard. That persistent look tortured her.

Irene seated herself on the bench, took off her gloves and hat and began to chat merrily with Julka.

'I must tell you that I am awfully glad to be able to talk with someone beside Mr Marwitz. I thought I should be doomed always to be silent in Poswicie. Out of despair I rode on horseback, out of despair I went to church every day, out of despair I came in a boat to that forest. This time my curiosity was rewarded. I saw a marvel of nature—an oak which must be a thousand years old.'

'Ah, Devaytis!' laughed Julka. 'Then you have seen Mr Mark's ideal.'

'What do you mean by his ideal?'

'Well . . . Mr Mark loves that tree more than anything or anybody.'

'Why? Perhaps it's some souvenir of his family?'

'It may be. . . . I don't know about that. . . . Mr Mark doesn't say why, but he respects that oak, and he can be found there very often . . .'

Here Marwitz interrupted the conversation. Hanka had disappeared into the house, having been called by Ragis, therefore the American, having lost the object of his attention, turned elsewhere. He looked into the garden and suddenly touched Irene's shoulder.

'Irene, what is that?' he asked in English, pointing slightly at something.

That 'something' was Miss Aneta and Grenis, both with sieves over their faces, surrounded by a cloud of smoke, and performing strange gestures round a bee-hive.

The girl looked inquiringly and turned to Julka.

'What is it?' she asked.

'That!' answered the girl, greatly amused. 'That's Mr Mark's aunt busy putting a swarm of bees into a hive.'

'Strange!' said Marwitz. 'I must go nearer and look at it.'

'Such curiosity might be painful to you.'

'Oh, no! I shall only observe.'

He opened the gate and disappeared.

In the meantime, in the room, Ragis and Hanka were talking with animation.

'What does she want?'

'She has business with Mark.'

'She also! One more! What shall we do with her?'

'We must offer her some refreshment. I will tell aunt.'

'Naturally, but it's useless, for even if your late father had come she would not leave her confounded bees for him. That Orwid girl is beautiful and she seems good. Why does she laugh so much?'

The cause of the great laughter was the hedgehog. The review ended, he had

clambered on the bench, entered Hanka's hat and fallen asleep.

Then evidently he had become thirsty, for with a great effort he left the hat, found the milk in a saucer, and began to drink it eagerly.

Irene was amused and caressed the hedgehog wonderingly. Ragis was angry with the gluttonous animal, and he approached the table, wishing to carry it away. Miss Orwid stopped him by a beseeching look. They glanced at each other simultaneously. It was the mute beginning of a great friendship between them.

'Ask the gentleman to leave me this nice animal,' said she to Julka.

Having heard her request, Ragis nodded in sign of consent, and seeing that ceremony was unnecessary, he put some berries on a plate, poured in some milk and handed it to her, asking her, by a gesture, to eat.

'Thank you very much. It will refresh me, for I am very hot,' said she.

Julka translated her reply into Polish, and the old man twisted his moustache and blushed from pleasure.

'Can you say,' whispered he to Hanka, 'that I acted badly? I always knew how to please the women! We didn't need Miss Aneta at all. And where is that homely man?'

He received an answer immediately. Quick footsteps resounded in the garden—

they were those of the dignified Marwitz. He was running—it must have been for the first time in his life—and waving his hands like a madman.

It was the result of his observation of the bees:

'Irene!' shouted he, 'one has bitten me in the eye, a second on the nose, a third in the cheek! Och! There is another buzzing round me!'

He rushed to the stable. When he returned his face was already swollen. He looked dreadful.

The young girls burst into pitiless laughter; the dogs, thinking that his running was an encouragement for them, began to bark at the American; Ragis was furious again.

'Miss Aneta has shown him nice hospitality indeed! He has become a bogy man. Dogs, quiet, you rascals! Shame on us! Miss Aneta! Miss Aneta! Be quiet, you rascals!'

He seized a stick and increased the tumult. The fun for the girls increased. They laughed till the tears came.

Hanka alone remained dignified. She pitied the American, as she did anyone in pain, though it was mingled with comicalness. She hurried to the garden, brought a bunch of herbs, and now, without any hesitation, she stopped Marwitz.

'You mustn't run about, for movement irritates the bees. Sit down, lay this herb on

the sore places and the pain will soon pass.'

At the sound of that voice the American stopped, looked at her with one eye—the other was a mound of swelling—and complied with the request.

'The stings are still there!' cried Hanka, looking at him attentively.

'Pray help me,' moaned Marwitz. 'I don't see, I don't hear, I am a cripple. It hurts awfully.'

With the gravity of a future physician she extracted the stings and laid the herb on his face. Irene and Julka laughed continuously. Ragis angrily put on a sieve and went to scold Miss Aneta.

Marwitz sat stiffly, like a Chinese god; then after a while he breathed, rose, took hold of Hanka's hand and raised it ostentatiously to his lips.

'Madam,' said he, 'I love tranquillity above all things, and during the whole of my life I have never disturbed it. I thought'—here he sighed—'that I should preserve these principles to my death. Alas! I had forgotten about bees. I am an inconstant man.'

Having said this pathetically, he sat down again, and turning to Irene, added,—

'Irene, you laughed. You always do laugh at me. I will forgive you on one condition:—don't tell this in Drake City; don't say that you have seen Clarke Marwitz rushing about. I could not outlive that!'

'You shall live with it, my dear,' answered she, smiling. 'Better thank Miss Certwan for coming to your help; otherwise you would have been still running about.'

'I shall show my gratitude to her by something better than words,' answered he, seriously.

Irene looked at him ironically; perhaps she understood what he meant, for she bit her lips and forced herself to be silent and grave. Julka also could hardly help showing her joy.

In the garden Ragis was grumbling. Miss Aneta sighed pitifully, for she realised the gravity of the incident with such a respectable guest. They both came to join the company. At sight of the brilliant gathering the poor woman lost her head. She went round the table saluting at every step and raising her skirt with her fingers in the old-fashioned way. She was afraid at the thought of what she could give the guests to eat.

They bowed to her silently. Julka explained to the old woman who Miss Orwid was; Ragis offered Marwitz some berries to console him; peace was being restored slowly.

In the meantime the village grew more animated: evening was approaching, the cattle were returning homeward. The street was filled with cows, horses and sheep, and resounded with the noise made by animals and people.

The gate to Mark's farm opened. The cattle, lowing, went to the cow-house. There were not many, but they were smooth, sleek, and—like Ragis's menagerie—accustomed to come if they were called.

The American looked with interest at the modest property of the man who, in Poswicie, had hundreds of thousands in his hands, but who did not wish to remain, and preferred to return to this half peasant farm to hard work. They had expected he was richer than that.

Then Grenis shut the gate and busied himself with Ragis in the courtyard; the servant went with Miss Aneta to milk the cows; the guests, left to themselves, chatted, looking oftener and oftener at the sun.

'Perhaps Mr Certwan will not return to-day?' said Irene.

'He must return,' whispered Hanka. 'They sent after him the day before yesterday. Many business affairs await him here.'

'Is it so? And I wanted to ask him to come to Poswicie.'

'I don't know if you will be successful. He must attend at once to an important transaction in Skomont.'

'My uncle waits for him.'

'Kazimiez has written asking him to come at once to Kowno.'

'The water has damaged the mills.'

'In fact, there is plenty for one person to do,' said Irene.

At that moment the dogs raised their heads, pricked up their ears, began to sniff and move.

'Mark is coming!' said Rymko, joyfully.

'Mark is coming!' repeated Miss Aneta. 'Ah, what can I give him to eat?'

All looked towards the street, the dogs rushed out to meet him.

In fact, Mark, Gral, and several young people from the village were returning from fishing. They were dusty, dirty and dressed in old clothes—they seemed very tired. Despite fatigue, joy returned to the young souls at sight of the houses, and the most joyful of them sang, as loud as they could:—

'Sparrow cooks the supper for the guests,
Dam, dam, dali dam,
And asks the birds under his roof,
Dam, dam, dali dam—under his roof.

Owl danced with sparrow,
Dam, dam, dali dam,
And trod on it's foot,
Dam, dam, dali dam—on it's foot.

Owl went to the court, sparrow to the hedge,
Dam, dam, dali dam.
Fox has eaten the owl, and cat the sparrow,
Dam, dam, dali dam—cat the sparrow.'

An outburst of general mirth ended the song. Mark alone neither sang nor laughed.

He was tired and hungry; after three sleepless nights his head ached; he could hardly move his feet after walking all day. He looked at his farm and thought what his aunt would give him to eat and drink, and how afterwards he would lie down and rest for several hours, and gather his forces together for to-morrow. The next day he was obliged to attend a family meeting in Skomont, but he was not afraid of it—he had plenty of money in his pocket-book, earned from fishing in the lake.

When they reached the village his companions took leave of him and went forward. Mark entered the courtyard accompanied by the dogs whining joyfully; seeing the guests he stopped in astonishment. In his thoughts there had not been one of those who were sitting in the front of the house and who now greeted him joyfully.

'Good evening. How are you?'

For a moment he did not answer. Beneath his eyebrows his tired eyes shone with a rare joy. He raised his hat silently.

'Good evening,' said he, at last, coming nearer. From the other end of the courtyard Ragis and Miss Aneta rushed forward to welcome their pet.

'You have come at last!'

He looked as though he were stunned. He nodded to Hanka and Julka, shook hands with Marwitz; he seemed to have forgotten

Irene's presence, and he paid no attention to his godfather and aunt.

'We have been waiting for you since noon,' began Julka. 'My uncle needs you very badly to-morrow, or, at the latest, the day after.'

'For God's sake,' said Hanka, 'come to Skomont at once and be prepared for a quarrel.'

'Do you know that the Dubissa has damaged the water-mill?' cried Ragis. 'One wheel was carried away. Go and redeem it.'

'Mark, dear, my boy!' said the old woman, when her turn came at last, 'I am sure you have not eaten. I have some berries for you. Supper will be ready soon. Sit down and rest.'

'But before supper you had better go in to Woynat. It seems that he is dying; three times he has sent after you.'

Mark was still silent. He was besieged on all sides. Hanka took hold of one of his hands and Miss Aneta of the other. Ragis shouted into one ear, Julka spoke into the other about her uncle's law-suit; even Marwitz mixed in the general conversation, asking him why he did not take him to the fishery.

Irene alone did not stir; with half-closed eyes she looked at that group of people. She glanced at every face. At length she looked earnestly at Mark. That gloomy,

silent man, indifferent to everything that was not business, had interested her from their first conversation at the railway station in Kowno. She had listened willingly to all Jazwiglo had told her about him, she watched his every movement.

The day of her arrival at Poswicie, when she perceived him in the crowd, her heart had throbbed; during the one week they were together she grew accustomed to him; when he departed she felt lonesome. Then she frequently thought about his gigantic size, his sharp features, steel-like eyes, and thin, never-smiling lips. The muffled tones of his voice resounded in her ears, and in spite of herself she thought of him very often, sometimes with anger, sometimes with strange curiosity.

Now, after she had not seen him for a long time, she found in him the same gloominess, and she felt, almost with pain, that her heart throbbed for a second time.

As for him, he did not look at her; as usual, he did not greet her; as though indifferent, he listened quietly to the various complaints, requests, business affairs and grievances, and waited patiently till they had finished.

When at length they were silent he answered in his laconical way, speaking in the first place to Hanka and Julka.

'Tell your mother that I will be in

Skomont to-morrow morning. I have some money for them. I will see the vicar in the afternoon.'

'Sure?' asked both girls.

'Yes,' answered he, and turning to Marwitz he added, 'Nothing preventing, I return on Thursday next to the lake, where I shall stay a week; if you like to come you are welcome.'

'It's my only passion. I will bring my line.'

Mark evidently came to his senses then for he kissed his aunt's hand respectfully.

'I shall be glad to have something to eat, and then to rest. We have been walking the whole day. Someone stole the provisions you gave me from the shed.'

'Oh, Lord! Poor boy! I will fry you some eggs at once. Poor thing!'

She trotted into the house, the young girls prepared to depart.

'Good-night, Mr Mark, till to-morrow, then,' said Julka.

'Yes,' said he, bowing.

The girls took leave of Irene; Ragis followed Miss Aneta to the kitchen; Marwitz took his hat.

'Where are you going?' asked Miss Orwid, quietly.

'I shall accompany that marvellous healer. It's evening, and they might meet a beast or a highway robber.'

'I will wait for you under the oak.'

'Very well.'

The two girls walked towards the gate. He joined them and they went out together.

In the centre of the courtyard the godfather remained with his godson. They talked quietly. Irene could only understand a few words.

'Go to Woynat. Perhaps he will ask you to forgive him, and will be reconciled.'

'Too late! Formerly I would have given everything for it, now I don't care.'

'Will you not go? He might die.'

'I will go, but let me rest a while. I am very tired and hungry.'

'Very well. Naturally. Rest. I will go and help Miss Aneta; my animals are hungry too. Speak with that lady; she also has some business. And where is that man who was stung? Ho, ho! perhaps he is courting Miss Aneta. I will settle him.'

After a moment only Mark remained in the courtyard and he looked timidly on the heiress of Poswicie sitting by the wall of his house.

She looked at him with her marvellous eyes, in whose depths, beneath the sparks of animation, was a penetrating, deep, longing look.

For one second their looks met; across his features there passed an expression of pain; he drew nearer and leaned against the hedge; they were both silent for a long time.

She waited in vain for him to speak first.

She rose, put on her hat and began slowly to draw on her gloves.

'I also had some business with you,' said she, 'but having learned how busy you are, I mustn't trouble you. Good-bye. Perhaps in the future—'

'Where is Mr Marwitz?' he asked, looking round.

'He went with your sister, whom he admires exceedingly. I shall wait for him under the oak.'

'I will go there with you.'

'You are tired and hungry. I don't want you to come.'

'I will come. You will tell me your business affairs; maybe I could be useful to you. It's not hunger and fatigue that bothers me most. The oak is not far.'

'Thank you,' she said softly, and in her voice there was a sound which entered his heart. He became silent.

They went out unnoticed, accompanied only by the faithful Margas. A few minutes later Ragis looked into the courtyard.

'Mark, supper is ready!' he called. No answer. The old man went into the garden; he looked everywhere.

'Mark!' called he still louder.

Silence, only the dogs began to bark.

'He went with Miss Orwid, naturally, and he said he was hungry and tired. Miss Aneta, do you know that our boy has gone

with the young lady of Poswicie? We can't catch the wind. He is cunning, and he lied. Ho, ho, ho!'

'He has gone?' answered the brave woman, wiping the perspiration from her forehead. 'Well, he must have found that a walk with her was more agreeable than food and rest. Why be angry? Let the poor thing enjoy at least one moment. God bring him good luck!'

'You are satisfied with everything. What good is there in that? A new sorrow, and it's the worst, it's sweet, like poison for flies; well, well, well, who could expect that? He walked all day and he went out again. In the meantime, Woynat will die.'

Miss Aneta was right: the gloomy man did not think either of food or rest. Irene leaned on his arm, and they walked slowly through the village to the crossing of the road. Only when there they began to talk.

'You didn't keep your word,' said she. 'You haven't come to see me for two long weeks.'

'I hadn't time.'

'Have you been in Jurgisk?'

'Yes, I administer the estate.'

'And you haven't given it up as you did with Poswicie?'

'There is no one there to rely upon.'

'What! There is a young lady of my age.'

'She is in very delicate health. She takes care of her blind grandmother.'

'Is she your bride?'

'No, madam.'

'But you love her?'

'Miss Janisewska?'

'Naturally not her grandmother. You must answer my question—do you love her?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'She is a good girl,' answered he, indifferently.

'I don't ask about her qualities; I want to know whether you are in love with her,' said she, impatiently.

He was surprised at such persistence; he looked at her and answered quietly,—

'I don't love her, but I would do anything for those two women abandoned by everyone. I see them often when I can spare the time.'

'Then you don't go anywhere for your own pleasure?'

'No, madam, nowhere.'

'And what about that old oak?'

He was surprised, his arm trembled.

'Who told you about the oak?' asked he.

'No matter who told me, the fact remains that I know. We will go there together, and you must tell me what memory attaches you to this oak. Will you tell me?'

'I have nothing to tell you.'

There was a moment of silence. The

young girl was biting her lips impatiently; he was looking at the dark forest, and listening to the familiar rustling. They entered the thicket; it was dusk already among the trees.

'Will you not lose your way?' asked she.

'I? In Devayta? I have been brought up here. I know every bush. Do you wish to go to the river?'

'No, to the glade. I promised Marwitz to wait there for him.'

He changed the direction. After a while they entered the glade. She pulled her arm from under his and looked around.

'It must be a curious page from history. There must have been a castle?'

'Yes, there was.'

'Why is it no more?'

'It lacked defenders. There is their grave mound,' he said, pointing it out.

'There must be some tradition. Could you not tell it to me?'

'There is not much to be told. They defended land and temple the same as we defend it now. They all fell. The enemy took the land, burnt the castle and destroyed the temple. That's all.'

'Our forefathers must be lying there also,' whispered she, looking at the grave mound. Her face became serious; some remembrance made her eyes sad. She sat on Alexota's stone, and after thinking a while, said,—

'It's strange how this glade reminds me of my childhood. When I looked out for the first time I saw around me a forest as black, and on the clearing our cabin built of logs. My mother used to leave me in the cradle and help father to clear the forest. It must have been hard work, for they made slow progress. The State was wild, full of Indians and beasts; we used to live on dried meat and roots; all round us there was neither a village, nor a settlement, nor a white man.

'The jaguars devoured our cattle, and during the night their awful roaring was heard round our hut. I was very much afraid, and I often cried; then father used to take me to his bed, and I used to fall asleep in his arms. My mother was delicate and she coughed continually; my father was often ill, because of hard work; we were often hungry, but yet they never complained and never were angry with each other. Their love must have been stronger than the whole misery of life. Despite all, they were happy.

'Who knows? Perhaps after many years of hard work they might have millions like the Marwitzs, they could return to their own country. But it happened quite differently —as here—in that glade only grave mounds remain.'

She was silent. Devaytis was rustling softly, and from the river came the mono-

tonous and sad splashing of the water. In that solitary corner there lived only reminiscences.

At first Mark listened indifferently, then he drew nearer, sat beside her, and looked stealthily into the narrator's beautiful face. Across his hard features flitted something like rays of bright and deep impressions.

'You were very little then?' said he, quietly.

'I was only four years old, but a child remembers such moments forever. One night the Indians attacked us; father defended the house, firing on the enemy while mother loaded his carbine. At length they succeeded in entering the house; one of them struck mother's breast with a tomahawk, two of them rushed against my father, the others started robbing the house. Lord! you wonder that one remembers such a night. A new-born baby would remember it.

'Darkness, howling, noise, the crash of broken furniture, the rooms crowded with human beings more ferocious than tigers, and corpses—such was that awful picture.

'I crawled out from the bed, trembling all over my body. I searched for my parents, calling softly, "Mamma! mamma!" No one answered me, for my mother was dead, her body was lying on the floor, cold . . .'

She could not continue her story. She grew pale, large tears, like pearls, fell from

her eyes, she trembled under the awful recollection.

Now Mark looked at her boldly. All that dreadful scene of murder was represented to his soul as though he also had seen it, as though he too were suffering.

And he was ashamed of himself when he compared all his sorrows and troubles, for all that was nothing in comparison with the grief and despair of that four-year-old child searching in vain for help from her dead mother during that awful night.

He had forgotten who she was, had forgotten what stood between them—that he had no right to bring her consolation, he, a poor stranger, to that rich girl; in his soul there was something that was painful and that attracted him to her till it burst out on the surface.

He bent forward, he took her cold and trembling hands and kissed them. His lips were trembling, a sob choked him, grief was tearing his heart.

'It causes you pain, pray don't talk,' said he, softly, and his voice, strange to say, was cordial.

At those words of sympathy she was quite overcome, and for a long time she wept silently. Then she conquered her emotion a little, wiped her eyes, pushed the hair from her forehead, and looked at him sadly but quietly.

'It's nothing. It doesn't pain me any more to speak about it than to dream of it and have that awful moment constantly before my eyes. So many years have passed it's time to harden. . . . Here it hurts me more, for I am among strangers—that's why to-day I cry more than usual. There, in America, I had so many good-hearted people who watched me constantly, and tried to make me forget that fearful memory—but here I think of it constantly. . . . In my parents' house it comes constantly to my mind. And they are so far! They died so miserably. You think that I have finished my story? No, I have seen worse things than that. My mother did not hear my crying, but my father did. He was wounded in several places, he was bathed in his own blood; they had left him, thinking he was dead, but he heard me, and found strength enough to rise, take me in his arms and crawl out of the hut. The night was black. He succeeded in crawling into the thicket; there he hid me and lay down beside me. I thought he was dead, I was afraid; I drew nearer to him and did not dare either to cry or to breathe.

'The howling in our hut still continued; they must have been fighting over the booty. Suddenly something shone first in one place, then in a second and third. The howling increased. Then a bright fire lighted the

glade and the forest. Our hut was burning. The Indians surrounded the burning mass, and dancing their war-dance, sang some wild and penetrating song. Frightened, I began to pinch father, crying, "Mamma is there! mamma is burning!" But he had fainted through loss of blood and did not come to his senses. And the glare increased and increased; the flames were devouring the work of so many years, all that we had, and —my mother's body.

'On the glade there remained only ruins and a pyre—as here. The enemy had taken all!'

'And your father?' whispered Mark.

'My father came to his senses and was able to drag himself to the nearest settlement. Happily he came to Mr Marwitz's farm. He wanted to return to his own country, but he failed in this as in everything. I think it would have been better for me had I remained there. Why did I come here? I am so lonesome here.'

Having said this she rose and looked round. They had not noticed that it was already dark. Several pale stars were shining in the blue sky, dew was covering the moors and herbs.

'I have detained you such a long time. Excuse me. Marwitz has evidently forgotten me. I shall return alone and send him back the boat.'

'Probably they have detained him at Skomont.'

'He deserves some reward for the weariness he undergoes for my sake in Poswicie. Good-bye, and thank you for your company. Will you never remember Poswicie? . . .'

'If you wish I will be there to-night.'

'Mr Certwan, is that because of pity?' said she, with a strange voice.

'Why?'

'Because I don't think you would do it for your own pleasure.'

He said nothing. 'Perhaps for my sorrow,' thought he, but he did not change his mind.

For the first time in his life Mark Certwan neglected his duty. Ragis and sick Woynat waited in vain for him; he went neither to Skomont nor to the vicarage, nor to Zwirble, nor to Ejniki, nor to his damaged water-mill. He remained in Poswicie.

Could he have foreseen the misfortune that was to fall upon him for that one day's delay, perhaps he would not have stayed there. But even then—who knows?

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT interrupted the fishing in Lake Wilajki. There were two parties of men camping on the ice, and both were resting after a day's work. In one were merchants with vans, in the other fishermen.

In the camp of merchant Jews there was noise, and some quarrelling by the Zmudzians' fire ; some tired men had lain down to sleep, others were singing songs or reciting their evening prayers, others again were smoking their pipes. There also sat Mark, Gral, young Downar and Ejnacki from Sandwile, and among them slumbered Clarke Marwitz, wrapped in a plaid ; he was exhausted through fishing all day long.

They had eaten their supper and now had surrounded Gral, who was telling them a tale in his usually sad voice.

' Beautiful Eyle was the only daughter in her parents' house ; she used to go and gather the flowers that grew over a lake situated in a forest. She sang beautifully. One morning the water of the lake opened ; a green serpent came out from the deep and

greeted her with a human voice. "Welcome, beautiful girl! I was a king's son, but the gods have changed me into a serpent for punishment. My name is Zaltis. Below, in the deep, I have a palace of amber and a garden of pearls, and there I recover my human form.

'"I lack nothing, only I am lonesome, for I am alone amidst my riches. My days pass in sadness, for no maiden wishes to marry me. Beautiful Eyle, come down, be queen of my palaces and my wife."

'Eyle, frightened, ran from the lake, but the next day something attracted her towards it once more and Zaltis came out again and besought her.

'The third time she consented and followed the prince to the bottom of the lake. There he became a young man as beautiful as the dawn, and he presented her with pearls and amber and introduced her into a palace laid out with corals, and there Eyle lived happily for several years. She brought her husband two sons and a daughter, and they loved each other as the sun loves the flowers, and nothing was lacking for their happiness. After many years she remembered her old parents and her grown-up brothers, and she asked her husband to let her go and pay them a visit. He resisted for a long time, but in the end he consented. "Go, then," said he, "but return soon and call me by my name. If I am alive

I shall come up ; but should you find that the water is red it will be a sign that I am dead."

'Eyle went, taking her children with her. She brought her parents and brothers costly presents, but she did not want to tell them where she had been, and she told the children not to tell either. The first night her brothers took out her eldest son. They beat him and tortured him but he would not tell them anything. The following night they took the other boy, but he also was silent, like a rock, despite tortures. The third night they took the girl, and she, because of the fright and the pain, told them everything. Then they took sharp swords, went to the lake and called, "Zaltis! Zaltis! come to me!" And when the joyful husband came out they severed him to pieces with their swords and returned home, saying nothing to their sister.

'After a week Eyle longed for her husband and departed. She went to the lake and, according to the agreement, called her husband, but only red water came to the surface and nobody answered her.

'Eyle wept bitterly that she had left her husband and no one could console her. Then the gods changed her into a dark fir tree, the elder son into an oak, the younger one into an ash tree, and the girl into a trembling and weak aspen tree.

'And for a long time people have seen those four trees bending over the lake, one

of them touching the water with its branches and rustling sadly, "Zaltis! Zaltis! Zaltis!"'

Gral became silent, sighing deeply. The listeners slumbered, lulled by the monotonous narrative. Mark alone did not slumber, but he did not listen either. His spirit was far away, as could be seen from the expression of his face and eyes. He looked into the shining and moving water, then into the fire, then on the sky full of stars, but his look had an expression as though it were concentrated on some image, and as though he were not looking upon the surrounding objects. He was dreaming with open eyes—he, wild Mark Certwan. He was thinking also about palaces and treasures, but not of the fairy tale—real palaces surrounded by fields and thick forests. He was thinking of beautiful horses and livery of silver, carpets, cut glass and lordly luxury. Now he did not care about his farm, nor about the water-mills nor about Zwirble, nor the gold-bringing lake giving him hundreds—he wanted thousands; the work of an ant might make him rich in ten years, he wanted millions now.

He was seized by some sort of torturing sentiment of uneasiness and fever. He tried to shake off these thoughts; he sprang to his feet then sat down again motionless, neither hearing nor seeing anything around him. But it was not his former quiet; he was suffering in his whole organism.

His comrades were sleeping; he and Gral were watchful. Martha's husband, notwithstanding that he was married to her, sang now, as formerly, a sad song about an evil lot. Complaint was continually on his lips, and now, having noticed that Mark did not sleep, he began to tell him about his sorrow.

'It's no use to criticise God's will,' said he, moving his hand, 'for it would do no good and would poison life. It's not God's but the devil's will that brings such infatuation. I ought to have gone away, to have trampled on the heart if it remembered, and plucked out the eyes if they remembered. Such great love is a sin. God has punished me for it. What have I? I have and I have not a wife. I have and I have not a roof. I must have sinned very much.'

'You take other people's woes on yourself,' answered Mark. 'Love is not a sin; only happiness gives quiet and satisfaction to very few people, and almost always sorrow.'

'Have you ever loved?' Gral risked asking such a strange question of the suspicious and reserved man. 'You haven't either been longing or despairing after Martha.'

'Who knows what is hidden beyond the teeth,' said Mark, answering with a proverb.

'It is difficult to keep silent,' sighed Gral. 'A man feels better if he tells of his sorrows. If you were much in love you could not be silent. It's true you would tell about it.'

'No,' said Mark, emphatically, after having thought it over for a while.

At that moment, still very far off, along the road there sounded the galloping of a horse. Both men looked up as if moved by some presentiment. Mark rose and listened, looking intently in that direction. Without any reason his heart began to throb violently. Who could ride at this time? It was not a highway leading to the town.

The galloping approached, the night, although without moon, was bright; there, near the bushes, a man on horseback appeared, but instead of following the road, he turned on the field and galloped straight to the fire.

'Who can it be?' whispered Gral, also puzzled.

Instead of answering, Mark rushed forward. He had recognised from afar the white mare with the colt; someone was coming to him at night.

The presentiment of some misfortune added to his strength; he rushed across the marshy meadow to the horseman. When he was about a hundred yards from him he shouted,—

'Who is it?'

'It's I, sir,' answered Grenis.

'Why did you come here?'

'Corporal sent me to tell you to return at once.'

'What is the matter? Someone dead?'

'The Jews came with the young master from Skomont and they cut the oak grove.'

Mark tottered; he wanted to shout—he could not; he wanted to ask some question but his voice stopped in his throat. He became red, like a man struck by a thunderbolt. His eyes filled with blood; he was shivering all over his body.

'He came this afternoon,' continued Grenis, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. 'Corporal went immediately but the young master insulted him. He will pay for it, for Corporal—' He did not finish for Mark's iron-like hand raised him from the saddle and threw him on the ground; then, without saying a word, the young man sprang on the horse, seized the reins, turned the mare and darted off like an arrow.

The distance was thirty miles; he looked up to the sky; it was uniform dark, not the slightest sign of dawn on it. It wanted three or four hours to the day; the distance was too long for old Bialka. She was of good breed, but exhausted by hard work and enfeebled by bad and scanty food. Under Ragis's care she had improved a great deal, and notwithstanding she had already made a long journey, she was trotting well, only from time to time she was uneasy about the colt, and commenced neighing.

Mark was only thinking how to make haste. He knew a much shorter way, seldom

used by anybody, passing through a wild tract of land, which was cut by two muddy streams flowing to the Dubissa. It was true that there were foot-bridges for the few people on foot; for those on horseback there were several fords, but no one went that way during the night, for it was easy to lose one's way, and it was said that the spirits of those who were drowned gathered there on the marshes. But what cared he about spirits and bad roads? He turned to the left and galloped forward.

Towards midnight the wind began to blow very low, shaking the bushes and twisting the sand; the mare pricked up her ears, the owl flew over Mark's head, and the country grew wilder and wilder.

Bent over his horse's mane he looked intently in front of him; on the sand he found his way by instinct, sometimes guiding himself by a footprint, at another time by a broken branch; there was no other sign of the road. Grey dust in large spots made him lose his way; several times he began to regret that he had chosen this direction for he was afraid of losing his way entirely in the wilderness. Should such be the case he would be riding till morning without advancing.

He remembered a tale told him by his mother about ghosts watching for people on such wild tracts of land, how they conducted

them round and round, tormenting them with fright. Involuntarily he touched his chest; he had forgotten the conjuration taught him by his mother, but instead he began to recite a prayer.

Suddenly the mare began to sink in the marshy land—he was near the first stream. He looked round, but could not remember that he had ever been there before; he must have lost the path leading to the ford.

The stream was flowing through turfy ground; it was black and luminous. The mare jumped involuntarily into the water, the mud reached her knees, she snorted wildly. She paused, however, stepped on the firm ground; for a moment she was out of breath, covered with foam and shivering with fatigue. She turned her head and feebly called the colt. It answered her faintly as though complaining. Mark drew the reins impatiently, the mare moaned like a sorrowful man, and gathering the rest of its forces obediently went forward at a trot. A mile further she stumbled for the first time, and, as though ashamed, began to hasten. Her steps were feeble and uneven. Mark felt she was shivering as though in a fever. He journeyed a few miles further; in the east the day was hardly breaking. 'Go on, Bialka, go on!' cried he, having looked in the direction of the rising sun.

He hurried towards that brightness; there,

there to the east were his foes, who wanted to rob the poor toiler of his only consolation, of his property, of his treasure.

When that thought passed through his head he gnashed his teeth, drops of perspiration appeared on his temples, despair was tearing his heart. He bent still lower and urged the horse on, not knowing what he was doing. Only swifter! only to come in time to rescue the old protoplast of the grove which had rustled for so many centuries over beloved Zmudz.

The other stream appeared among the willows. The mare hesitated a moment and jumped into the water. Brave animal! A net of veins appeared on her skin, her sides were steaming; she reached the bank with a great effort and neighed again.

'Let me rest,' she seemed to beg of her master, 'let me rest! I served you as I could so many miles.'

But Mark paid no attention to anything. The east grew brighter and brighter. The mare stumbled and fell on her knees, he pulled her up, stroked her with the reins; she rose, rushed forward blindly, stumbled, ran perhaps five minutes longer and fell again, moaning. He raised her, drawing the rein; she wanted to go, tottered, dropped her head, searching in vain for equilibrium; her strength abandoned her, she fell on the ground, pressing her rider.

Only when he came to his senses he understood that he tortured a poor animal, and he regretted it.

He disengaged himself from beneath the horse, loosened the girth and helped the mare to rise. But Bialka had already finished her services, honestly until her last breath; moaning pitifully, she was dying in the wilderness, only two or three miles from home; she was no more to be tempted either by oats, water, or by a comfortable stable. Her eyes became dim, whilst the blood flowed from her nostrils; her tired feet shivered, she had reached the winning post.

Mark took off the saddle and looked with grief at the noble animal. He was seized with a quiet, implacable wrath felt only by silent people. He shivered, set his teeth, pulled his cap over his eyes and went forward in the direction of that light that announced the morning.

The cocks were crowing and one could hear the distant barking of the dogs; he rushed forward swifter and swifter. By the time he had found the road the light in the east had become red, the day was rising bright as if for good luck.

The village was hardly awake when he passed it. He had become black during that one night, and fearful, like one damned. Nobody had noticed him; only Margas recognised and followed him.

The tops of the grove were gilded by the sun; it stood still and rustled as usual, greeting the owner. He slackened his pace a little and breathed, when suddenly the muffled and grave rustling of the branches was disturbed by some foreign, short sound, which made the blood rush so to Mark's face that the white of his eyes and temples became red.

He sprang forward like a lion trying to defend his den; in a few bounds he was in the glade, only a few paces from his old friend. He looked and roared like a lion. On Alexota's stones—there where some years ago Julka stood, reciting a heroic poem, where a week ago Irene Orwid had told him her story of her childhood, where so many times he himself had sat and thought—stood now a big, red-headed Jew, with an enormous, dishevelled beard, clad in dirty clothes. He was holding an axe and striking the trunk of the old oak with it, trying if it would be good for shelves.

At every blow a few chips fell on the ground, a muffled moan resounded and a shiver ran through the branches to the top, where a frightened grey eagle was flying over his nest.

Mark became dumb. It seemed to him that someone was cutting a human body, that the tree was complaining of pain.

For a moment he had forgotten what he

was doing. What was it? A hurricane! Suddenly the Jew snorted and flew into the air. Iron-like arms lifted him and shook him as though he were a rag; thrown like a stone he made a circle and fell ten paces further, stunned and motionless; he had fainted.

The axe fell from his hands; Mark seized it and rushed at the Jew. He did not know himself what he intended to do. Madness made him blind, and common sense forsook him. He was acting under the impulse of the instinct of protection, grief and vengeance. He did not remember anything.

That thief, that cheat lying at his feet, snorted. Let him suffer for having caused pain, let him be wronged for the wrong he had done!

He had raised the axe—God knows what would have happened if at that moment someone had not seized him by the arm. It was done so unexpectedly that he dropped the axe and looked round, sure that another Jew had came to the rescue.

His blood-shot eyes, looking wildly from underneath his contracted eyebrows, met Irene's sharp and penetrating look. She stood near him and pressed his shoulder—she was pale, out of breath and dreadfully frightened.

'What is the matter with you?' said she, with changed voice.

He was silent. His breast was rising and falling like a blacksmith's bellows. His teeth were shining between his lips; on his forehead, covered with perspiration, the veins stood out thick like ropes.

'Throw that axe away! What has happened here? What have they done to you?' asked she, pulling him aside. She took the axe from his hands.

He was silent but intelligence was returning to him,

'Why did you wish to kill that man?' she asked, trembling. With his looks he pointed at Devaytis, at the traces, made by the iron in the bark, that were like fresh wounds.

'They have cut your oak? Who permitted it?' He opened his mouth with difficulty.

'My brother,' said he.

'Witold? Unlawfully? Then defend yourself but not that way. My boat is there. Go to Poswicie, take my best horses and summon the authorities for protection.'

He came to his senses entirely. The blood left his face but he did not move. He hung his head as if ashamed, and said, after a while,—

'Thank you. Until now I have kept my sorrow in my soul, but to-day there was no room for it. Had it not been for you, blood would have been shed.'

He glanced at the Jew, wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his sleeve, and continued,—

'Since midnight I hurried here until my horse fell, then I ran on like a madman. My despair increased every moment. God was merciful. I came in time.'

He breathed deeply, and, already quieted, he advanced a few steps towards the tree.

'It has stood here so many centuries. So many generations have defended it and respected it, until, for punishment, God sent these people who do not respect anything. It is most trying, for what are we worth without souvenirs of the old fame and virtue?'

Perhaps never before had so many words come at once from the mouth of that silent man.

Like the sun looking from behind the clouds, so in that moment there came from the depth of his soul a glorious glare of all that he had suffered.

He looked transfigured and mighty, so that his sunken eyes were lighted by those rays, and sparks seemed coming from them.

Never before had he been as he was now. Why, in the presence of that strange girl, did the words rush from his mouth and the blood to his heart and temples? Why did he trust her and believe in her so much? How could he be sure that she would understand him? Perhaps he guessed there was in her a kindred soul and a kindred sentiment in her eyes that looked at him so gravely.

'Not the drones build, but the bees,' said

she. 'Those who think and feel as you do will not permit that which is good to perish. Don't be afraid,' she added; 'we shall be able to defend that oak and all that it represents.'

She smiled at him encouragingly. He drew himself up and raised his head defiantly.

'Yes, we will defend it,' repeated he, emphatically. 'As long as I am alive no axe shall touch my Devaytis. I thank you once more.'

This time he put out his hand towards her.

'Go and bring the police, I will remain here. Your oak will be safe under my protection,' said she.

'I shall send you a protector and then I am sure my godfather will search after me. Be so kind as to tell him where I am gone.'

A moment later he was no longer in the glade. He shouted to the dog to remain; faithful Margas lay at Irene's feet and watched.

Irene sat on a stone and thought for a few moments, looking in the direction in which he had disappeared in the hazel tree thicket; then she arose and approached the Jew.

He was coming to his senses little by little. He began to moan and groan.

'Had I come a minute later,' thought she, 'where would you have been to-morrow, you hero? God is merciful!'

In the meantime strange things were going on in the forest. One could hear in

the distance the strokes of axes and shouting; then there sounded roaring and movements. Human voices were mixed with the barking of dogs and the trampling of horses; a few frightened squirrels rushed across the glade, the alarmed birds were chirping.

Irene looked round with interest. Was it a rescue?

Suddenly those who caused the noise appeared from the thicket. It was Rymko Ragis with his army of quadrupeds; he was followed by young men on horseback and on foot. The old man was surprised at perceiving the heiress of Poswicie; the escort, having noticed the Jew, began to shout. They rushed to him.

'It's the chief himself, the same who purchased the forest! A scoundrel! Something has killed him! Look!'

They whispered that 'something,' timidly making signs of the cross in fear. Rymko hobbled in that direction.

'Dead! you don't know what you are talking about! He lives, and will live, unfortunately for any honest man. If "something" had struck him he was served rightly. Ho! ho! ho!'

He looked askance at Irene. He had understood whose hand had acted here and that it must remain a secret. . . . He was afraid of her as a witness and scrutinised her with his looks.

'Boys!' cried he, 'divide in two parties and rush after those wood-cutters whom we chased. Be careful and don't commit any violence. Sit down near them and watch them. If they take their axes then rise and gently take them from their hands. Nothing more, understand?'

'Yes!' answered the boys in chorus, and being accustomed to obey the sorcerer they rushed in all directions.

That was what Ragis wanted; he came swiftly to Irene, winked his eyes, lowered his voice, and asked in a whisper,—

'Was Mark here?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'And you saw that?' said he, pointing discreetly at the Jew.

'I did,' said she.

The cripple clasped his hands as though in prayer. 'You must not tell anybody,' besought he. 'They have wronged my boy throughout his whole life. From the cradle his life was hard. He defends himself like a boar attacked by dogs. He has not done it through maliciousness but from despair. Justice, however, does not ask what is in the soul; it judges only the deeds. You must not testify against him.'

She was almost offended at this speech, which she only partly understood. She shook her head, and after having searched for a moment for words, answered,—

'Mr Certwan went to bring the police whilst I watch the oak. Help the Jew.'

The old man became beaming with joy; the sorrow disappeared from his wrinkled face, he looked on her with admiration.

'Nobleness dwells in you, and intelligence too! Ho! ho! ho! the advice was clever. It's understood. I must help him.'

After a few minutes' care the Jew came to his senses and sat on the ground, looking round.

'What is the matter with you? Had you fainted?' asked Ragis, naïvely.

'Ay, violence! What was it? Where is that murderer? They have killed me! Violence! I will go to law! My head is split, my heart is wounded! I am killed! I am a corpse! Ajey . . .'

'Then you must have climbed after birds' nests; you fell from the oak and you have wounded yourself.'

'What is nest? What is .to fall? I purchased the forest. They have killed me. I will give him to the law courts.'

'But whom? For when we came there was not a living soul here.'

'What is soul? What is come? I have tried that old oak but somebody seized me and killed me, my hand fell off; something hit me in my chest, I am killed!'

'You must have been drunk when you came here. You should not have touched that oak. For in its trunk the Evil One is

sitting. That is why no one touches it, for as soon as there is a chink in the bark the Evil One comes out and kills. You rapped on the oak so long that it came out.'

The Jew looked round with his frightened eyes. He glanced at the cripple and the young lady.

They could not be his aggressors. He remembered the wood-cutters, the haste ordered by the man who sold the forest, and he stood up moaning.

'Oh,' groaned he, 'they have taken away all my wealth! Oh!'

Bent and stumbling, he went into the forest. Ragis shook his fist at him.

'Go! go!' muttered he. 'Better thank God you are still breathing.'

In the glade there now remained only two people faithful to the persecuted man. Irene would have liked to talk to the old man but she had not her manual of conversation with her. She was obliged, therefore, to listen and answer by signs.

Ragis was not so silent as Mark. His mouth was continually open; he could talk with a hedgehog and with a crane, with a lord and with a peasant. He did not care whether they listened to him.

He climbed the stone and looked attentively at the wounds made on the oak.

'No harm done,' he decided. 'It will outlive a hundred generations more. It's

strong. Ho! ho! ho! such wounds are trifling. It will recover even without Miss Aneta's pimpernel.'

He descended and noticed Margas.

'Ah, you are here? You deserted your master to watch a lady? Very well. And do you not know where Bialka is? Mark must have tired her exceedingly. Poor Bialka! Witold is only a lad, but he greatly disturbs the peace of the people. Mark will settle him when he returns with the police. He deserves it. From whence did such a weed spring up in the family? They petted him and they spoilt him. They ought to have whipped him.'

He sat near Irene and lighted his pipe; he glanced at her several times. 'Perhaps you don't like the smell of tobacco?'

'No, no,' said she with friendly smile.

'Thank you. When I was a soldier a pipe very often took the place of food and drink, and then it replaced enjoyment, company and family. I taught Mark as follows: "My son, don't go out in the evenings, and if you have nothing to do, then light your pipe and look at the smoke."'

Irene laughed merrily. That advice given to a young man was very singular, but evidently it had brought some results. Mark never smoked in her presence, but several times she had surprised him sitting bent, smoking a pipe and following the clouds of

smoke with his eyes. What did he see in it? How could it replace an entertainment?

Ragis smiled also and said,—

'There is nothing worse than wandering in the evening and talking without necessity. What good did he get from visiting the Woynats? He drowned his heart in the mud and thought he could catch the wind with a net. Would it not have been better for him to smoke a pipe and stay at home with me?'

'Who is Woynat?' asked she. 'His uncle has that name. He lives beside us. He had a grand-daughter; she was young and not homely. They must have given him a love potion to drink for it was not worth while troubling one's self about her. He fell in love and wanted to marry her. Yes, catch the wind in the net! Ho! ho! ho!'

'Will he marry?' she asked with evident animation.

Ragis laughed triumphantly.

'Ho! ho! ho! Have you ever seen the wind in a net? No one will see that! She is already married. Mark became black from that sorrow and I am as glad as if I had caught a land-rail with my hand. But such sorrow was better than a wedding with her. It's understood. We will celebrate his wedding, but quite differently.'

'When?' asked she, inquisitively, but with gravity.

In a couple of years, when he has become

richer than he is now.' The old man freely spoke, as if he were talking to a friend or to Miss Aneta. 'When he has less work, pays for the land and builds a new house, then we will marry him. Old Rymid has an only daughter; she is beautiful and as industrious as a bee. Olechno has two girls; in Jurgisk there is a good and pious young lady. He does not wish for a rich girl; poor but good-hearted and intelligent will do. Ho! ho! ho!'

He became silent for a moment; he must have seen the wedding in the smoke of his pipe.

Irene let her face droop, became gloomy, but soon a half-challenging, defiant, half-cordial smile glided across her delicate features. She looked at Ragis ironically and rose.

The sun was already high. The bright day had turned cloudy. A strong wind was blowing from the Dubissa. Mark had not returned.

'Perhaps you need something?' asked the old man, rising also. 'We shall have some rain. I am glad I have gathered the hay. You must hasten home before it rains.'

She shook her head negatively. She walked slowly round the glade. Ragis hobbled after her, talking to the trees and to the clouds.

'What is that?' asked she, suddenly stopping.

At her feet was something like an opening of an old well, overgrown with herbs.

'Subterranean passages of the old castle,'

answered he; 'they say there are plenty of them under the whole of the oak grove, but they are now almost filled up with the earth. There are several openings like this. Some of those passages go as far as the river.'

'Have you ever been there?'

'Am I not fond of my life? I am not anxious to get the treasures, and then no one would find them there. Mark went there when he was a lad. Bad boy! But he did not find either the gold or the wine about which they prattled; he only brought out a human skull and a rusty axe. He hardly came out alive, there is such bad air there, and he never went again; no one would dare go there except him. Don't look there! A bat might come out, the ground might slip.'

The air grew still heavier; the rumbling of thunder resounded in the distance. Suddenly Ragis's dogs began to bark and rushed forward against a strange figure which appeared from the thicket. It was Marwitz clad in a mackintosh, carrying an umbrella, a plaid and some white bundle. Having noticed Irene he began to move his arms like the wings of an old-fashioned telegraph.

'How did you learn that I was here?' asked Irene.

'Mr Certwan told me,' answered he, out of breath. 'He took a horse and rushed away like a mad man. I don't understand at all what is going on.'

'They sold his forest unlawfully. A Jew wanted to cut it down.'

'Let us lynch him!' decided Marwitz, gravely.

'They don't administer justice in American fashion here. What have you brought?'

'A plaid for you, and luncheon.'

They sat under the oak; Ragis observed them from a distance. As much as he liked the brave, young girl, even so much he disliked the thin American. 'A scarecrow!' muttered he to himself.

Irene untied the bundle. There she found a bottle of wine, some sandwiches and bonbons. It was Marwitz's idea to bring her such a lunch. She seized the bottle and the glass and ran to the old man; she filled the glass and handed it him, looking at him cordially.

He drank, wiped his moustache and smacked his lips.

'Hundred-years-old wine from Poswicie! What a drink! Thank you very much. I feel younger now. Ho! ho! ho!'

With a sign she asked him to join her at lunch. All three ate heartily; the rain began to fall.

'You will get wet,' said the old man, and Marwitz added,—

'Irene, go home. If you wish I shall remain here, although, upon my word, I don't understand why we are camping here.'

'For fun, my dear,' answered she, smiling,

and not paying any attention to the storm. She gave Margas a sandwich, wrapped herself in the shawl and waited patiently.

'Where is this Mark?' muttered Ragis. The rain began to pour. The thunderbolts were more frequent and the wind bent the tops of the oaks. They all sheltered under the protecting boughs of Devaytis. The clouds were black, and every little while a flash of lightning rent them.

'You will get wet, Irene,' cried Marwitz, unable to hold the umbrella.

'I am wet already,' said she, mirthfully. 'Look, what a magnificent sight!'

'I am fond of peace above all,' said he, complainingly.

'Perhaps a thunderbolt will startle the Jew,' said Ragis, after every flash. 'But where is Mark?'

Mark had accomplished his purpose. A horse from Poswicie carried him to town. The money helped him to obtain the interest of the authorities in his case. He was returning with policemen by post as fast as the horses could go. The representatives of public peace came on the spot, little harmed by the rain. There, on the edge of the forest, lay ten oaks that had been cut down, and a group of woodcutters were sitting near, surrounded by the young men from the village. In the centre of these men was the Jew merchant, pulling his hair, cursing and urging his workmen.

He knew that his case was bad; he was mad with helpless anger. The storm was already over. There was another among the people. The officials, on the ground of Mark's complaint, placed an attachment on the forest. The man who sold it was not the exclusive owner; he could not dispose of property common to the whole family. They forbade the Jew to cut any more and told the wood-cutters to return home.

On the battlefield remained Mark, the Jew and the officials finishing up their report.

'Well, what will happen?' asked the merchant, gloomily and defiantly. 'Here was violence, they have beaten me. I complain. I gave money—return my money.'

'I have not taken it,' answered Mark.

'Well, your brother has taken it. What will happen now? It's violence! Robbery!'

The officials had finished their work. They spoke aside with Certwan and went away whistling, evidently satisfied that they had done their duty. Mark thanked the young men for their rescue, asked after Ragis and went to the glade. The Jew followed him.

'I sha'n't give up my money. Give me either money or forest. I tell you give it me. Read the contract. I have paid ten thousand roubles cash. I sha'n't give it up.'

Mark was silent like a stone; perhaps he did not listen.

'Well, sir, why should we quarrel? I will pay you another ten thousand. Give me the forest. I offer you more than it's worth. Why should we go to the Law Courts?' said he, passing the road and changing his voice from threatening to obsequiousness.

Silence again. The Jew was panting as if in serious plight; he tried a more successful means.

'Sir, I have your brother's promissory notes for fifteen thousand roubles. I will give them all to you for the forest. Let us make peace.'

The light from the glade passed through the branches. Mark looked towards it and hastened. The Jew grew mad. His face became black, his eyes shone threateningly, he crossed Mark's way.

'You don't accept?' said he, gloomily. 'Well, as you wish, but remember and don't regret it. I sha'n't beg any more.'

The young man frowned. He pushed him out of his path.

'Get out, you snake!' muttered he. 'Go and bite, but you sha'n't have this forest for millions. It was mine and it shall remain mine. Remember!'

'Yes, I will remember,' answered the Jew, stopping.

Those who were already in the glade had noticed Mark coming. All three arose, but Irene was first by his side.

'Well, where are the police?'

'They have already gone. And have you been here during the storm? Was it necessary to get wet, to get cold?' said he, quietly.

'I did not get more wet than you, and I rather liked it. Don't they cut the oaks any more?'

'No, everything is quiet. Ah, godfather and Mr Marwitz are here!'

'We all watched your tree. What will you do next?'

'I must be going to Kowno.' Ragis was coming and cried already from afar.

'Where is Bialka?'

Mark waved his hand.

'Last night,' said he, 'she fell under me beyond the stream Lejka.'

'You have killed her. What a pity! Where is the colt?'

'I don't know what became of it.'

'Man, are you crazy? You have killed our best horse and lost a lovely colt and you are not sorry at all.'

'I have no time; I must go to Kowno to protect my forest.'

The old man grew red with anger at such indifference, spat, called the dogs and went away quickly without taking leave. He went to find the mare and her colt. He pitied Bialka and his little pet, which was as intelligent as a man. He searched for a long time in the wilderness. He did not go

home although he was wet through and through; he wandered round swearing and moaning. At length the dogs found the trail and conducted him to the spot. Bialka was dead, stiff and covered with mud; there was curdled blood at her nostrils. The saddle was beside her, and over her, with drooping head, trembling from cold and hunger, stood the colt, an orphan, touching its mother and neighing faintly; overhead black ravens were flying, singing to the brave mare her death song. The bolder crows flew down and looked into her dead eyes.

Ragis leaned on his stick and was near crying; then he became angry.

'May devil! . . . Thieves and robbers! Like those ravens for their prey, so you are rushing to wrong others; you take away sweat, strength, health and money. Poor old mare, you were worthy of a better death. You were better than a great many people. Well, little orphan, come with me. Your mother can no longer feed you. But I sha'n't permit you to die from hunger. Come to the stables and don't!'

He pulled the colt after him, complaining pitifully.

The ravens croaked louder and louder, coming nearer and nearer to their feast. Night was falling on the wilderness. The wind carried the complaints of the colt far into the distance.

CHAPTER IX

THE post bell was ringing monotonously on the highway.

It neared the river, where the ferry-boat was lying near Jurgisk, and at length it stopped ringing. The traveller told the coachman to stop, paid him, and bade him return.

But instead of crossing the river he turned to the side and went in the direction of Poswicie. The full moon, shining in the cloudless sky, looked inquisitively into his face. The traveller, as if ashamed of the light, pulled his cap over his eyes and hid himself in the shadow of the trees and bushes bordering the road. He listened attentively to every rustling; he walked cautiously like a thief. The nearer he approached the *château*, the swifter he walked, and his every step was more cautious; he stopped several times, as though he intended to return, but after thinking a while he continued on his way. Evidently the desire, urging him in that direction during the night, was stronger than reflection.

He stopped again at the park hedge. The

shadow of the trees covered him entirely; he raised the cap and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. During that moment the moon satisfied his curiosity, for it looked into Mark Certwan's gloomy eyes and caressed his dark, sharp features with its silvery brightness.

What did he want in that Poswicie which he had hated? He did not need to return here, as formerly; he had his own house, he was free. If Lukas Gral had met him here, with that depression of uneasiness and longing, he could have repeated what Mark had said to him when he was complaining—'You have what you wished for.' But Gral was not there, and the weakness and suffering of the silent Zmudzian was seen only by the night, silent as he was himself, and only God heard his prayer for help.

Fate is merciless and avengeful. It punished Mark with Poswicie, where he complained so often and from which he wanted to go away as soon as possible. Now he had returned there without being forced to do so by necessity, but by some inexplicable, bitter desire. Fate scoffed at his resistance, at his pride and his obstinacy; it tormented him continually like a nightmare, and drove him to the place of his former exile.

'You executed your father's will as an expiation and punishment. Go there now of yourself, for without that expiation you will not be able to live.'

Mark, standing by the hedge, heard that voice. This thought had lighted his cold eyes with fever and made the line of his mouth longer through the constant interior fight. He suffered like a damned man, every day losing more and more of his former desires and aims, and neglecting his duties.

To-day, having returned from Kowno after a week's absence, and not far from his own house, he could not overcome the temptation. He went, having forgotten that beyond the river a hundred business affairs and hard work were waiting for him. He, who was never ashamed or afraid of anyone, was hiding like a thief; he, who blessed heaven that he could leave Poswicie, returned there during the night, climbing over the hedge.

What merciless vengeance of fate!

Again the remains of his pride and strength of will rebelled—in vain!

He jumped over the hedge and was in the park.

The dogs, having heard a slight noise, rushed to him; the watchman, whistling somewhere, was following them. What would happen should he notice him here at this time? The blood rushed to his face and covered it with heat of shame and humiliation, but notwithstanding that, he went towards the *château*, hiding himself in a most luxuriant thicket.

Happily the dogs recognised him, and

having greeted him, left; the watchman turned in another direction.

Mark breathed.

He did not come to steal or to rob, why then was he afraid and ashamed?

In the *château* the windows were already dark; only one, that of her chamber, was lighted and open.

A slight wind moved the curtain; beneath the window stood a large linden tree.

He could climb it and look into the room. But Mark stood in the distance, folded his arms across his chest, leaned his head on the tree, and looked at the light, breathing heavily. Fate had conducted him there, where it wished, and had thrown him a prey to torture and bitterness. And the torture must have been awful, for he became pale; and the bitterness must have been dreadful, for he bent, half closed his eyes, and his lips moved, pronouncing words which no one could hear.

A dark, tall shadow moved in the light. Irene Orwid was undressing; she did not trouble about the window and that she was alone.

He stood and looked. He wanted nothing more, only to remain there with his pain and delight. These two sentiments blended in one; he did not know which was the worse to him.

Suddenly the light was extinguished. He

shivered, hung his head and retreated very slowly. The scent of the roses was better here, the moon shone brighter; he did not like to leave. Only when near Dubissa he came to his senses, for here only he began to think of how to hide his deed. It was necessary to disappear without leaving any trace. Consequently he took the worn boat, a piece of board for an oar, and left the shore. There were no traces on the river, the noise made by the boat was muffled. He jumped out on the other bank, let the boat and the plank flow with the current, and disappeared.

Now, having come to his senses, he ran forward, thinking what he should say if Ragis asked where he came from on foot at this time of night. For the first time in his life he did not greet Devaytis, but turned into the highway leading from the ferry-boat, and only there slackened his pace. Here everyone might meet him.

But the night was already thick and no one was travelling. The cock crew for the second time in Sandwile when he entered the street. He looked indifferently on the houses; they were all dark. Only in Gral's house there could be seen a fire in the fireplace.

Mark was not astonished at this. The sad man perhaps had also returned from the fishery during the night.

He wanted to enter and ask after the result,

but thinking that he might meet Martha, he gave up the idea. He should see him to-morrow; nothing pressed.

In fact, for a certain time, Mark had neglected every business in that way. He did not rejoice at prosperity; he was not sorry if he did not meet with success.

He went further. Strange that the village, notwithstanding night, was filled with smoke. Where did it come from? He looked round. Everything was quiet.

Well, certainly the shepherd had made a fire of wet branches and the smoke was coming from there.

Suddenly something rushed under his feet. It was Margas. Mark bent to caress the dog, and noticed, to his great surprise, that the animal was without hair and badly wounded in several places.

'Margas, what has happened to you?' exclaimed he.

The dog whined pitifully and rushed forward, turning to his master from time to time.

A few steps further and he understood everything—the dog's wounds and the smoke. Those biting clouds did not come from the field, but from the place where he was going to pass the night. He stood and looked; Margas looked into his eyes and howled several times. After that there was complete silence.

Mark's farm lay like a black, broad wound. Instead of buildings, house, garden, hedges, there was a heap of smoking ruins.

The chimney of the house stood up like a ghost; the half-burnt trees stood out against the background of a bright night; the wind was raising smoke from the shapeless ruins, and there was a choking smell of burnt things.

For a quarter of an hour, or longer, the owner of that ruin stood and looked. He rubbed his eyes with his hand, and thought he was dreaming and that a nightmare tormented him. No, he was in full possession of his senses, and what he beheld could not disappear, but would remain as well in the light of the sun as in the light of the fire. Despair, like a nail, was driving slowly into his brain. His tired legs trembled, he sat down on a stone, which, as it had done a year ago, constituted again the hedge, and leaning his head on his hands, moaned,—

'Lord, Lord! Of what am I guilty?'

As though understanding his pain, Margas came to him, and whimpering, licked his hands. Mark lifted his eyes and rose.

'Margas, where are my people?' asked he. 'I hope they are living.'

In answer the dog turned towards the village. He conducted his master. Following him, Mark reached Gral's house, and this time opened the door without hesitation; at the

sound of its creaking there was a movement in the house, someone came out to meet him.

'Who is there?' asked Ragis, whose voice was strangely changed.

'I,' answered Mark, already speaking in his quiet way.

'Where do you come from?'

'From the burnt farm. Are you all well?'

'No, my son. Gral is dying,' whispered the old man through his tears.

'What is the matter with him?'

'He tried to bring something out from the burning house, the beams fell on him and crushed him. The third day he was in agony; the vicar left just a while ago. Come!'

They entered. In the room the sad man was lying, covered with wounds; he was greatly changed. Martha, Miss Aneta and a few comrades from the village were in the room.

How strange! During the whole of his life Gral had been complaining and sad; now, in the presence of death, despite his sufferings, he lay quiet, and smiled.

Martha was kneeling beside the bed, sobbing and tearing her dress. And he smiled despite wounds, pain and agony, as though nothing ailed him, as though he were not sorry for anything.

Miss Aneta, bent and crushed, sought no

help for Gral, either in herbs or ointment, and he did not ask for anything; neither for medicine nor water. He looked into Martha's face with unusual brightness in his eyes and smiled sweetly. Seeing Mark, he moved, and called to him to come nearer.

The giant bent over him.

'Lukas, you had no pity for yourself,' said he, with emotion.

The dying man shook his head.

'No, no,' said he, 'God wished it thus. I gave your money to godfather. I thank you for everything you have done for me. I am glad, oh, very glad!'

Again he looked at Martha and added, as though speaking to himself,—

'If you knew how happy I am, how happy . . .'

He closed his eyes. The smile remained on his dead features.

Ragis recited a prayer, sighed, and called Mark into the courtyard.

'The Jew is imprisoned,' said he. 'Grenis and your dog caught him.'

'When did it happen?'

'Last Thursday. After that quarrel in the forest I was in Zwirble; Miss Aneta at the vicarage, where she had delivered the church linen from the wash; Grenis was gathering the hay from beyond the garden. I left Margas in the room to watch the house, and I went to work. All at once smoke came

out, then flames. We all rushed to the rescue; all the village helped me. A true day of the last judgment. Woynat's house nearly caught fire, but as the wind was blowing in the field they saved it. Gral was coming back from the lake. He entered the fire like a moth, he threw out Miss Aneta's box and a holy image, then the rafter fell on him; we brought him out half dead. They could scarcely bring him to his senses, and all in vain.'

They bent their heads mournfully.

'Are the cattle burnt?' asked Mark.

'Only a calf; the oxen and horses were in the pasture. The young lady from Poswicie and Julka rescued the colt.'

'Miss Orwid was here?' muttered Mark.

'Everyone was here—even Hanka, although her mother did not want to let her come. There were plenty of people to fight the fire, and the water only two steps distant; but we couldn't do anything for the scoundrel had lighted the fire in four corners, and straw and resinous wood burns easily. In four hours everything was over.'

Mark opened his mouth, stammered and became silent.

Miss Aneta came out of the house and approached them.

'I have left that poor woman to welcome you, my dear boy,' said she, pressing his head, which was bent towards her. 'Don't

be discouraged. He who lit the fire is in a worse position than you are. Human justice and God's sentence can't miss him, and you will build again. Whom God wishes to reward He first scourges. You will see that your sorrows will soon be over. You must thank God that you have not lost anyone dear to you, as that woman has.'

'Aunt, I did not trample on anyone's love as she did. She does well if she weeps, only it's too late now. Gral is happy; he died as if he were going to a wedding. It's worse to live.'

'My dear boy, my poor child, suffer only this last misfortune. It's the last trial. You will rest soon.'

'God grant me the same rest as Gral,' muttered he, gloomily.

'Boy, keep quiet, don't blaspheme!' rejoined Ragis. 'I and your father have lived out worse calamities than that. Wait till morning and then you will come to your senses.'

'I am calm, only I see that I shall not be able to come into the possession of anything. I will wait till morning, and then I shall go to work. Aunt says that it's the last sorrow, but I don't think so. I learned in Kowno that Witold wishes to have me judged by the neighbours. In a week I go to the vicarage, where they will decide whether I am guilty or not. My

stepmother will gather her friends. I know what their sentence will be.'

The old people were sorrowfully silent. Only after a short time Ragis said,—

'It's not necessary for you to go.'

'And the result will be that to-day they have burned my farm; to-morrow they will do the same with Zwirniki; the day after to-morrow Ejniki; and then the water-mill in Jurgisk. I must finish it. That way or the other, it's always bad.'

He waved his hand and sat down on the bench.

'The Jew will be sent to hard labour in Siberia,' said Ragis.

'What is that to me? I have had hard labour here already,' muttered he.

Miss Aneta sat down beside him.

'Mark, you are not alone in the world. When the farm was burning I looked at it quietly, but when so many people rushed to help I began to cry for joy to see how many friends you had in misfortune. There are good people, I tell you. Even you would not have worked so hard as did the peasants from Skomont and Poswicie in fighting the fire, and you would not have wept as much as old Dowgird and that good girl Hanka did. You should have seen the young lady from Poswicie!'

'She is a brave girl,' interrupted Ragis. 'She came over on horseback with that scarecrow.'

'He is not a scarecrow at all!' interrupted Miss Aneta in her turn. 'Who brought out the cage with the birds? Hanka said, "I regret most those imprisoned singers." Young Downar rushed in for it, but couldn't stand the heat; then Wavner went, but returned burnt; and that stranger went slowly. He burnt his hair and hands, but he brought her the cage. The birds were still alive.'

'They alone remained. All my animals, and even my flute, were burnt; I sha'n't play any more.'

Mark wanted to ask some questions, but he only bit his lips.

'There are plenty of good people in the world,' said the old woman. 'One suffers more easily when one thinks of them. The next day everyone brought us some provisions. We have plenty of everything for one year.'

'But the best present the Lord gave us with them—a kind of hope and patience,' added the old man. 'And then we hadn't much time to think about misfortune, for we had rescued poor Gral. Black Julka, two physicians, the vicar and Miss Aneta all tried to keep him alive. They did not succeed. We must bury him. Mark, say something. Are you dumb?'

'Have I ever been talkative?' muttered Certwan.

'Your late father was the same. He did

not speak, but the whole of his life he worked quietly. You have inherited his disposition. You won't give up work, and through it you will become great. I know you well, my dear boy,' whispered Miss Aneta, quietly rising.

Once more she pressed Mark's head to her breast, then she wiped her eyes and said,—

'Let us say nothing more about our misfortune, for it's less than the sorrow in this house. Mr Ragis, go with Mark and dress poor Gral in his best clothes and I will prepare the bed for him; the boys will help me.'

She called the young men from the house with a gesture. They brought a camp-bed, covered it with a rug; one of them went for some candles, the others had gone to fetch the planks for the coffin.

Martha was lying on the floor, moaning and sobbing. Thus they passed that night.

The first ray entered the house and fell on Gral's corpse. Dressed in his Sunday clothes, young, he lay smiling. His burnt face had become beautiful from that expression of joy; in his clasped hands he held a wooden cross; from afar the church bells were calling him—the same bells which rang for his baptism and wedding—and in the cemetery there was waiting for him the grave dug in the yellow sand. And he smiled.

In front of the house Mark and Downar planed the boards for his last home. Ragis was carving clumsy letters on the cover. Miss Aneta was making a pillow of shavings. Martha sobbed continuously.

The neighbours began to assemble. They uncovered their heads and paid him a respectful visit. That day he was the most important man in the village; at last there had come a moment when his wife cried after him, when his friends regretted him, when the most indifferent people praised him and Certwan worked for him. No wonder that he smiled so sweetly.

The people coming from the room surrounded Mark, anxious to see whether he was changed, but he did not raise his eyes from his sad work and hardly answered their friendly questions. Perhaps, according to his custom, he did not listen, but was thinking about something else? Bent, with the long hair covering his face, he planed the boards.

'You are back!' Suddenly a familiar voice sounded in his ears.

He stopped. He stretched out his tired hand to Julka Nerpalis.

'I thank you for your efforts during the fire,' said he.

'They were not of much use. I pity you heartily. Hanka cried so that she can hardly see. Mrs Certwan shut her in her room, as a punishment for running like an

urchin to see spectacles. Those are not my own words.'

'A beautiful spectacle indeed! Ruins of so much work; and here is a handful of dust of a strong man.'

She blushed with animation, brave girl! and continued,—

'Miss Orwid told me that she could not sleep. She is a noble soul. Although she doesn't cry, one can see how much she feels your misfortune. Even Mr Marwitz is sad. He has lost his side whiskers in the fire and skin on his hands. He rescued the birds for Hanka.'

'And you rescued the colt,' said he, without interrupting his work.

'Not alone. Miss Irene heard it neighing in the stable. They had forgotten the poor little horsey. We opened the door, but he didn't want to go out, and we were obliged to pull him. Soon after that the stable fell down. Grenis did the best thing; he caught the Jew while he was stealing through the gardens. They found him with a bottle of petroleum, matches and rags. Out of fear he confessed that the merchant who purchased the forest gave him ten roubles to do the work. Then something dreadful happened. I never saw such a sudden change in Mr Marwitz and Grenis. One became green, and shouted, with hoarse voice, "Lynch, lynch him!" and the farm man became so

mad that he dragged the Jew directly to the fire. Had it not been for Hanka they would have administered justice to him on the spot, but she began to beseech Mr Marwitz and to call Mr Ragis.

'Four men were hardly able to take the prey out of the hands of the farm boy. After that he did not want to do anything; he sat and cried.'

'Why did they not stop Gral?' said he, bitterly.

Julka looked round cautiously and lowered her voice.

'It seems to me that he sought for death willingly, for it was possible to come out when the rafters began to crash. They say he was waiting for such an opportunity. Who knows?'

'Yes, who knows?' repeated Mark, taking a saw.

They fitted the planks and began to nail them together. The hammers resounded monotonously.

'I see you are also a carpenter,' said Julka.

'When I was a lad I learnt a little, and I am glad, for it is an old custom that the coffin should be made by friends and not by strangers.'

'A friend will do it better and make the bed more comfortable,' rejoined Downar.

'Where is his wife?'

'In the room, she is crying,' answered Mark.

'During his life he wept and she laughed,' said Downar, 'and the death has changed it to the contrary.'

At that moment the noise of a carriage was heard in the street. All looked. Irene Orwid alighted alone from a small carriage. She was dressed in black and was paler than usual. Julka, Ragis and Miss Aneta hastened to welcome her; Mark alone did not move, and only when she passed him he saluted her respectfully. They all followed her to the room in which the body lay, and at that moment Downar said,—

'Certwan, where are you driving that nail? There are two there already.'

After a long prayer they all came out and surrounded Mark. Irene looked at the coffin and said,—

'Mr Certwan, you ought to be ashamed. The dead man is smiling and serene while you are gloomy and sad.'

'He smiles,' said Miss Aneta, moving her head, 'for he has reason, my beautiful lady. God put the soul of an angel into a miserable body; and it was complaining continually. But when about to be free it touched his face with its wing, and that bright sign remained after it . . .'

At this Julka smiled, Downar opened his mouth and his eyes, Ragis shrugged his

shoulders; Mark alone showed no impression, and Irene said,—

'I should like to see the same expression on Mr Certwan's face before his death. It seems to me that you ought to be joyful after every misfortune.'

'It will be so,' said the aunt. 'Misfortune will make him great.'

More people were coming. The women began to cry, according to custom; the court-yard was crowded.

'Let us be going from here,' said Julka. 'The coffin is almost ready. I will take Mr Mark; uncle told me to do so. Will you accept hospitality at the vicarage? Everything that was rescued from the fire is there already. Let us be going.'

They had driven the last nails; the carpenters had finished their work and placed it under the wall.

'Thank you,' said Mark, 'but I have no time to accept your hospitality. The ruins must be cleared; I must look for wood for buildings; towards evening I must go to the lake. Let godfather rest! Aunt, you must rest also . . .'

'I shall stay here; if you don't need me I will remain with poor Martha. There is so much work and sorrow and she is alone.'

'Then let us go to the ruins,' said Irene. 'Thank God we have plenty of wood in our forests. Your buildings will be soon ready.'

'I have no money,' thought he, following her. Land improvements, the repair of the mills, payments made to Kazimiez, to Hanka, to his stepmother, the law-suit for the forest, had emptied his wallet. He had only a paltry amount.

Ragis and Julka followed them at a distance. Irene looked at them, and lowering her voice said softly,—

'You will not be offended if I ask you for something? It seems to me that half of your character is composed of monstrous pride and the second half of awful stubbornness, to be silent and not to show anything. I know much about you, and sometimes I pity you, but sometimes I am very angry with you. Why should you torture yourself without any reason or need? Your soul ought to be put in the fire and then struck, to give it another form, for the one you have is inhuman in its implacability.'

He did not answer, but looked at the ground.

'Why are you silent even in my presence? I am so friendly—with all my heart! You sha'n't deceive me with your indifference and quiet. I know that underneath there is torture and Hell.'

His arm shivered. He looked at her suspiciously and answered,—

'Hell—no! Torture is not the same as damnation.'

Her eyes shone.

'Why should you torture yourself? Silence doesn't help you to conceal anything. The one who wishes to understand will understand. You will never succeed in conquering one thing—never!'

He blushed, and a spasm of pain passed across his face, as though she had touched a wound.

'Merciful God and my father in Heaven will protect me from committing a meanness. I never give in to anything sinful.'

She frowned threateningly.

'You don't understand me, sir! What I am thinking about is neither sinful nor base, and as it's great and good it will break you.'

'Our social positions are not equal, and everything has quite a different aspect for me to what it has for you,' answered he, after thinking a while.

Ragis and Julka reached them. They stood on the ruins.

The old man entered the ruins and turned to Mark.

'The little storks fell into the fire with the rest. Do you see how the old birds fly round above us? In that ash my poor hedgehog was burnt. Nothing is left.'

Mark took a few steps and kicked the ruins of the burnt house. Suddenly something resounded under his foot; he bent and picked up a scorched object.

'You only remained! Not burnt!' said he in a half voice, but with an outburst of deep emotion.

It was the black knight, cast in iron. The flames had not changed it at all. He was rushing forward on his black charger, a sword in his hand and a shield on his arm. Julka rushed to him.

'Our knight!' cried she, with sparkling eyes, looking proudly at him. 'Where did you get him from?'

'He was always hanging over my bed, and he is not burnt,' said the young man, greatly moved.

'Oh! This one is not afraid of misfortune. He was hardened long since,' said Julka, smiling.

'What is this?' said Irene, inquisitively, coming up to them.

'Our knight!' repeated Mark, carefully wiping away the ashes.

She understood. She put out her hand for it and looked at it a long time in silence.

'Powerful!' whispered she, as though to herself.

Ragis came nearer and clapped his hands joyfully.

'You have found Wejdawutas. Well, thank God, then! We are all together again.'

'Who was Wejdawutas?' asked Irene.

Ragis leaned on his stick, and being pleased that a stranger listened to him, said,—

'He was a great hero—one of the first. He was a hero, although dressed like a peasant and watching a king's servant's cows. And when a dragon came out from the sea and terrified the country the king sent a generál against it, but Wejdawutas arrived before him and killed the dragon.

'The glory fell on the general, and Wejdawutas was silent and continued to watch the cows.

'Then came a still bigger dragon, and he killed it also; the general cut off the head from the dead dragon, and was praised for his bravery. Wejdawutas was silent, and did not try to get glory for his deed, for he cared only to fight, and wished to do good to the country.

'The third dragon was so fearful that the king promised his daughter as wife to the one who would kill it. Wejdawutas went again and fought until morning; he was wounded and lost much blood, but he killed the dragon. As usual he did not go to get the reward; he returned to the cows and served modestly.

'The general found the dead dragon, cut off his head, and returned to the castle.

'They made preparations for a wedding—Wejdawutas was sad. They told him to prepare a bath. When he had done so he sat down to dress his wounds, which were bleeding, and the king's daughter found him thus.

'She asked, "Who wounded you?" but he was silent. "Who are you?"—he was silent. He only looked at her and became dumb from admiration.

'She told her father. They asked him, but he was silent; then she asked him and he told her everything.

'The news spread; the generals desired and wanted to get rid of him.

'Then he arose and said: "And where are the teeth of those dragons which you have killed and whose heads you have brought to the king?" The teeth were not in the jaws, for he had pulled them out and hidden them.

'He brought the teeth, and Wejdawutas became great as an eagle, and like an oak over all the nation. And the king gave him his daughter for wife, made him commander over his army; the generals he ordered to be beheaded.'

Ragis became silent. Irene had listened to him intently. She had understood the tale, for every day she grew more efficient in her native tongue.

During the narration she looked at Mark, her own eyes were beaming with enthusiasm. Evidently she was triumphant over something, which he evidently understood, for when Ragis had finished he made a movement, blushed, and said,—

'Godfather, you have not finished as the old folk used to finish:—

'And the princess said to Wejdawutas, "Why were you silent?" and he answered her, "For I was unworthy to walk in such splendour, and marry a star, for I am a very poor wretch."

'Yes!' said the old man, indignantly, 'You are going to teach me how to tell tales? The idea! I never yet heard a tale in which it was told what a man said to his wife after the wedding ceremony.'

Julka burst out laughing and Mark blushed at such scolding.

'My mother taught me so,' muttered he.

'It must be so, for it looks like woman's prattle, in which there is no sense for a penny.'

Julka looked at Certwan, then at Irene, then again at Certwan. Some thought crossed through her intelligent head.

'And I even heard what Wejdawutas's wife answered him,' said she, laughing.

'What did she say to him? Tell it us,' said Irene.

Julka became serious, and imitating Ragis's voice, said,—

'And the princess said, "You are not a wretch, but a hero, and greater light comes from your deed and sword than from my crown." I have finished.'

'The princess was wrong,' decided Miss Orwid, shaking her head defiantly. 'She ought to have said, "We are equal, for I love you and you love me. You are not a

herdsman, but my husband; and I am not a princess, but your wife. Let us be happy!" Is it not true, Mr Certwan?'

Mark looked at the ground and was silent for a long while.

Julka laughed and went to Ragis, who had gone in the direction of the smothered bee-hives.

'Is it not true, Mr Certwan?' repeated Irene.

'Wejdawutas ought to have suffered till the end and not have said a word,' muttered he.

'Then he would have remained in obscurity. The best way is to be silent when it's necessary, and to speak when it's necessary. You mustn't forget that tale and change according to your fancy. Will you give me your forefather? It would be as if I had your portrait. Can I take it to Poswicie?'

'With pleasure . . .'

'Thank you, Wejdawutas,' said she, smiling. She glanced at the ruin and became grave immediately.

'Coming back to our conversation, will you be offended if I ask you something?'

'If it's necessary to do something for you, I am ready.'

'Accept from me the word for the buildings. Do me this favour.'

'No, thank you; I am grateful for your kind offer, but I don't need anything.'

'I hate you!' said she, angrily. 'You are heartless and you have no delicacy! You

think it's agreeable for me to carry that amount of obligation which I have towards you?'

She turned quickly and left him. Her carriage was waiting for her in the street; she wanted to get in, but she remembered something and stopped.

'Miss Julka,' called she, 'have you a moment of time? I should like to ask you to come with me.'

'With pleasure,' answered the girl student. Ragis guided them. They both entered the carriage.

'Good-bye, Mr Mark,' said Julka.

Irene turned her eyes away and said nothing.

The horses went off. Beyond the village, near a little chapel, stood a crowd of peasants. One could distinguish among them clothes from Skomont and Poswicie, mixed together like a multi-coloured mosaic. Dressed in their Sunday clothes, gathered in groups, they talked with animation.

'What does it mean? A meeting?' asked the American girl.

'Maybe they are going to my uncle to ask him to settle some dispute about boundaries,' answered Julka. 'It's their highest court. Our people are good and sound yet. They can't graft socialism here. But I am talking while you have something to tell me.'

'Yes, what are you going to do with Marwitz? He is madly in love—with Hanka!

I am tortured by his sighing; it's a whole sea of sentiments. How will it end? Will he at last find somebody to whom he will be able to give his legendary ring?'

'The ring which you rejected, as you frankly told us?'

'If I could find in my heart at least a little bit of love, I would accept his ring without hesitation, for he is an honest, good-hearted, intelligent, industrious man, notwithstanding his homeliness. But I didn't wish to remain in America, for I wished to do my father's will; and then I didn't love him.'

'But Hanka would not go with him to America, although I believe she begins to love him.'

'She begins? Thank God! It's much already!'

'Then she would not interrupt her studies, and she would not marry a man of different religion. If Mr Marwitz liked to wait three years and change his religion, then perhaps she would accept that unfortunate ring.'

'Many obstacles indeed. I must send him back home and write to his father. He recommended me so earnestly to take care of him, as if he were of glass. Well, he will return a little bit chipped, but it's not my fault.'

'Nor Hanka's either.'

'Miss Aneta's bees are guilty of all that. Do you remember?'

Both laughed, remembering the amusing scene.

'When are you going to Paris?' asked Irene.

'The day after to-morrow. The studies begin in a week.'

'I am sorry you are leaving me. I shall lose in you my only friend.'

'Did you visit Skomont?'

'I went there for Marwitz's sake, but if you leave he will not go there any more. I am not going there any more, for I hate hypocrites.'

'Have you met Mrs and Miss Janisewska?'

'Well, they are not very amusing. The grandmother moans and the grand-daughter grows gloomier and thinner. Have you no one else to suggest to me?'

'There is Mr Mark Certwan.'

'I have had enough of him. I prefer not to see him and not to irritate myself.'

Julka shook her head in astonishment.

'You too are against him like everyone! What a strange lot! Everyone is either afraid of him or dislikes him.'

'And you?'

'I alone will remain faithful to him. Our friendship is old and never disappointing. This man is without any weakness and his character is spotless.'

'That's why he is unbearable. He lacks some weakness. He would be then a little bit humbler and more accessible.'

Julka laughed merrily.

'Why do you laugh?' asked Irene.

'I am laughing, for from what you said I suppose you treat this question not from an objective point of view, as I do, but from subjective. That's the reason why our opinions about Mr Certwan will never agree.'

Irene blushed.

'You are right,' said she, at last. 'What is most provoking to me is that he also treats everything from an objective point of view.'

'I think you are very much mistaken. Since a certain time I have seen in him a great change. It looks to me as if that weakness which you accuse him of lacking is present. I look with the eyes of a future physician, and I prophesy that this weakness of his will change to a heart trouble.'

'That's what I should like to see,' said Irene, joyfully.

The carriage stopped in front of the *château* of Poswicie. Marwitz came out to meet them, chewing the end of a cigar. He looked, and not seeing Hanka, sighed like a whale.

'What have you been doing, Clarke?'

'I have caught four fish,' said he, sadly.

'And we have been talking about your destiny. Do you know that these ladies are going away the day after to-morrow?'

'I know it; my trunks are ready.'

'Are you going too? Where? To America?'

'I am going to Paris.'

'Are you mad?'

'Irene, you always decide too quickly,' said he, sadly. 'I shall go to Paris and wait there quietly.'

'What are you going to wait for?'

'Till Miss Certwan finishes her study.'

'Three years? Man, come to your senses! And what about your father, factory, family?'

'They can wait for me.'

'But Miss Certwan would not follow you beyond the seas.'

'Then I shall remain here.'

'But she doesn't care for your religion.'

'Then I change it. I have promised myself to marry her, and I will marry her.'

'Well, do as you please. I am going to write to your father and wash my hands of the matter.'

'Such stability will conquer Hanka entirely,' said Julka, joyfully. 'You may consider your ring as accepted.'

'I carry it always in my pocket,' sighed he, pathetically, while both young ladies laughed heartily.

. . . . . .

In the meantime, by the chapel situated at the crossing of the roads, the crowd of peasants increased. There were also many women carrying bundles, young people and children.

They talked about something, and they moved along, not to the vicarage, but

straight to the village. At the head were bailiffs of both communities, their counsellors, and the older men, and they were followed by a crowd of toilers of the land. They walked solemnly through the street as far as Mark's farm.

The owner of the burnt house, Ragis and the farm boy were clearing the place of the ruins. The crowd entered the courtyard and stopped.

'May Jesus Christ be blessed!' greeted the bailiffs, and then the crowd.

'For aye,' answered Mark, raising his cap. An old peasant and a patriarch of Skomont came forth and said,—

'We come, sir, to pity you. But compassion, although agreeable to the heart, will neither restore the house nor build another. With words we can't raise walls or resuscitate the cattle. Therefore we gathered with our brothers from the other side of the river, and we bring you, sir, our compassion and our help. We have no money to help you in your misfortune, but we have plenty of strong arms. Then don't be sorrowful, dear sir, about the workmen, only get materials and we will come, as now, in a crowd, everyone who is strong, and we will re-build your farm.'

Mark looked into the face of the speaker, then on the crowd standing with uncovered heads, and suddenly he began to weep.

His strength could not stand the impres-

sion such words and such a sight had made on him.

The tears flowed from his burning eyes. He wiped them away with his sleeve and muttered, with difficulty,—

'Brothers, what have I done for you that you are so good to me? How could I deserve this?'

They all began to talk, the women cried.

The old man told them to be silent and spoke again.

'Everyone has something to say. One about a field, another about sickness, a third about his children, a fourth about cattle. In every house you and your fathers have done something good. I shall answer for all of us. You were to us like a brother, you respected yourself and us, you came to our help when we were sick, when we were hungry, when we were burnt down—you gave us good advice. We were silent, but we remembered; it's our turn now to pay you back all that, and we came. No one remained home, we are all here. We thank you, sir, that you have received and understood us.'

'We thank you! we thank you!' repeated the crowd.

Now the women came forth and began to lay at Mark's feet the bundles which they brought.

In them were dried mushrooms, flax, bacon,

eggs, dried fish, loaves of fresh bread, everything they had in their larders.

'We also have brought you something,' said they, weeping. 'Do you remember, sir, when you freed my boy from military service? Do you remember, sir, my husband, when you sent him in a van to the physician in Kowno? You rescued my girl from drowning in the river. And when the pestilence killed my cattle you made me a present of a heifer. Do you remember this and that?'

In the meantime the young men whispered among themselves and passed through the crowd of women to Ragis.

'We have not brought you anything,' said the boldest among them, 'and didn't say anything. Instead of that we will do something for you. Hey! boys, take off your coats and let us work. Let us clear the place for building.'

They rushed at the work like one man. They pulled down the rest of the burnt house, they carried away the half-burnt rafters, they cleared the place of coals and ashes.

A hundred working hands disappear the sad remnant made, the ground was levelled, no trace of fire remained; the place was clean, white, the bricks were put in order. It seemed as though the wind blew and carried away the remembrance of the calamity.

They finished and wiped their foreheads, that were covered with perspiration. Ragis

spoke to them about something; they surrounded him, and the older men talked with Mark about how to get the building materials.

Then they all went away.

'You will let us know where and when we have to cut the trees,' said one of them.

'May the Lord reward you, for I can't,' muttered he.

'We are already rewarded, for you have accepted our offer. May God give you some consolation. Let us be going, brothers.'

They went. In the street they all cried,—

'May Jesus Christ be blessed!"

'For aye and aye!'

Mark wiped away his tears, Ragis looked at him and said,—

'Well, my son? Now you don't regret that you live? Gral can't weep such tears as you do. Your tears are better than his smile; I am sure they are better! . . .'

'Let us be going to his house,' whispered Mark.

'Very well, my boy. I will collect the presents and put them aside. We are now richer than we were before. Grenis, are you rooted to the ground? He became an idiot because of the smoke. Put the bundles in the van and carry them to the vicarage; the boys have done our work.'

. . . . . .

The next day they carried the body of the dead man to the church.

The bells called him; the church banners moved over him, and a quiet, scented, bright summer day wished him farewell.

The fields, the meadows, the larks took leave of him.

He will not return from that journey! . . .

Certwan, Ragis and Downar lowered his body into a consecrated grave and built a grave mound over it. Martha fell on it and moaned dreadfully.

Love for him came to her too late.

They all went away; only Miss Aneta sat by her brother's grave mound and thought sadly. Suddenly old Woynat came out from the corner of the cemetery; he looked cautiously around and approached the young woman.

He prayed for a while, then he touched her arm.

'Martha!' said he, quietly.

She raised her head and drew away from him.

'Come to my house,' said he.

'Let me be . . . let me die,' she sobbed.

'Return to my house,' repeated he.

'No. You drove me away. I prefer to become a beggar! . . .'

'I am very sorry for it now; I pity you. Return!'

Here Miss Aneta approached them and said,—

'Martha, you had better return if the old man asks you. Evidently his conscience

speaks to him. It's a great punishment to be alone when one is old.'

'Forget,' said Woynat in a whisper. 'I will be good to you. I am already quite different.'

The birch trees rustled sadly over the reconciliation.

Mark and Ragis returned to the village.

'What can we do now?' said the old man, caressing his little moustachios and smiling cunningly.

'I will go to the lake. Perhaps in a week or so I shall be able to earn enough money for the wood.'

'How much do you need?'

Certwan waved his hand.

'I can't even dream of building everything again. Perhaps we shall only be able to get the house ready by winter.'

'How much do you need to build all the buildings?'

'There's no use in talking. More than two thousand roubles. Perhaps during the winter I shall be able to make some money.'

'And what shall we do in the meantime?'

'Well, we shall get along somehow.'

'I don't like that,' muttered the old man.

Mark became silent. He was walking with Rymko, and being deep in his own thoughts had not noticed that the cripple had left the road, entered on the fields and was leading him in the direction of Eynia. The village remained on the side, the evening was

coming, Ragis walked in a zigzag, looking round attentively.

At length the banks of the stream appeared in front of them ; over them grew willow and wild raspberries. Near the stream stood a crooked, half-withered old willow.

Seeing it, Ragis walked straight towards it.

'I am sure you think that you have sheltered two old good-for-nothing cripples—such as I and Miss Aneta.'

Mark grew pale with indignation.

'You have never insulted me before, why do you do it now?' muttered he, gloomily.

'Well, even if you had thought so it would not have been a sin. It's true that we are cripples. We were battered by sickness, by hard work, by dreadful war for so many years. We are shells, that's all. Ho! ho! I remembered well when you told your dying father that you were going to take me. I remembered and I said to myself : "Old man, you have a wooden leg, then look out that your head does not become a cabbage head." Ho! ho! I remembered.'

Certwan, amazed at such a strange speech, looked at the old man and was surprised.

'Where are we?' asked he, looking round.

'Where could we go if you haven't your own house? I took you to talk and walk,' answered the old man, looking attentively at the trunk of the willow tree. Then with

difficulty he put his sound foot on a low branch and tried to raise himself.

'What are you doing?' cried Mark, opening his eyes wide.

'Nothing, my boy, nothing. I don't take any rest. I have hidden something in the hollow of the tree, and I am trying to get it.'

Saying this, he rapped the trunk with his stick, tore a piece of bark, put his hand in the chink full of rotten wood and took out a tin tobacco box wrapped in a piece of cloth.

'Here it is,' said he, descending with difficulty.

Mark rushed, took him by the shoulders and put him on the ground.

'Do you wish to break your other foot?'

The old man pulled the cape over his shoulder, twisted his moustache, and, winking his eyes, said,—

'Lords, noblemen and peasants offered you their help. Ho! ho! Naturally. But is the old lame man worse than they? Why should Rymko not give a present to his godson? Why should he not help him? Here it is.'

He handed him the box he had pulled from the hollow tree, put his hands on his hips and looked at his godson, beaming with joy.

Mark opened the box and screamed; the box fell from his hands, and on the ground was scattered, like rainbows' rays, hundred-rouble bank notes.

'What does it mean?' cried the young man, not believing his own eyes.

Ragis laughed.

'Don't be afraid, it's not witchcraft. It is the same money that you gave me for repairs and other things when we came to your farm. Do you remember? I wanted not to touch even one kopek of them, but I couldn't. I spent one hundred roubles, and I now return you two thousand and four hundred. Pick them up, go and buy the wood for the buildings. By winter we will have house and barn. What are you doing? Let that be.'

Mark fell at his feet, and embracing the old man's knees, said something in a voice choked by tears. Rymko put his arm round his neck and embraced him.

'Let me be, my dear boy,' he repeated continually. 'Don't you know that I am a sorcerer and that I don't need any money? I was wise not to hide it in the house. Ho! ho! Naturally. It's understood. In the old willow tree they were safer. Let me be. Better pick up the bank notes and don't waste time. You see that such an old cripple as I am was useful for something. And where will you purchase the wood?'

Mark rose, kissed Ragis's hands; in his eyes there was an expression of deep gratitude and quiet. There was not the slightest trace of sorrow.

He gathered the money, put it in his

pocket, and said, with muffled voice, 'I will buy it in Poswicie.'

'Do they like to see you there?' asked the old man cunningly, turning towards the village.

Mark was silent, he could not lie.

'Why don't you answer? You are hiding an owl in a bag. Ho! ho! Naturally. It's a sure hiding-place. . . . Well, go to Poswicie, and may the Lord help you.'

The young man hung his head, pressed his lips together and passed his hand over his forehead.

'You mustn't ask the Lord's blessing for me, for I am only going there to buy wood and nothing more.'

'A kind word doesn't hurt. One does not always return with that for which one went. . . . Ho! ho! I am going to hobble to the vicarage. The young girls are going away to-morrow; I shall take leave of them and see the orphan starling. I am sorry I haven't my menagerie any more.'

He sighed, and after a while, as though to gain courage, he sang,—

'Friend, now let us divide the booty!
For you the snuff-box, for me the saddle and horse.'

They parted, and Mark went in the direction of the oak grove.

That day he again passed the old oak without greeting it; he did not listen to its grave rustling. Something else was talking in his soul.

CHAPTER X

A WEEK after the events just described, the vicarage in which Rev. Michael Nerpalis lived was full of animation. The organist and the sexton were clearing the paths in the garden and putting the modest drawing-room in order. The vicar was walking to and fro; he was uneasy and thoughtful.

About one o'clock in the afternoon carriages and broughams began to arrive and stop before the gates, and cracking of whips and snorting of horses resounded. That quiet house, covered to the roof with luxurious trails of purple French bean and ivy, had never seen so many distinguished guests at one time.

Mrs Certwan arrived first with the marshal of nobility, her relation. They were accompanied by Witold and the marshal's son, both on horseback. Then in an old-fashioned vehicle came the Nestor of the county, George Rymwid, followed by the two brothers Olechnowichs, Mr Ilnich, a neighbour of Poswicie, and lastly by Mr Leon Radwilowich, the arbiter and famous

speaker of the county. They all sat round the table, on which appeared the vicar's mead. The conversation was animated, and amidst it could be distinguished the high-pitched, sweet-sour voice of Mrs Certwan.

After two hours the gentlemen began to gape and look through the window; they would have been glad to finish that act of justice, but the most important person was wanting—the defendant.

'I am sure he will not come,' said Witold, smiling.

'It would not be like him,' defended Mr Ilnich.

'You don't know him,' sighed Mrs Certwan.

'It's difficult to know him, for either he is working or sits closeted in his room. He is always silent,' said George Rymwid, caressing his enormous moustaches.

'What a dreadful and bad man he is!' exclaimed Mrs Certwan again.

'In operas the executioners and jealous husbands look like him,' said Witold in a whisper to his cousin, offering him a cigar.

'I am very anxious to see him. I like people with an individuality, be it even bad,' answered the marshal's son, a pale-looking youth, with evident traces of mental strain in his tired eyes.

'Why not send a messenger after the culprit?' advised Mr Radwilowich, raising his voice rhetorically.

'Witold!' screeched Mrs Certwan, 'be so kind as to look if he is not coming.'

The student rose carelessly from the sofa on which he was almost lying, and making a noise with his boots, went to the verandah.

At the door he whistled some popular melody without any restraint.

In the verandah the vicar was standing with a pitiful mien. His broad, always kind, face was sad; his look uncertain. He was wiping his forehead with a red kerchief and muttering something to himself. For several years he heard Mark's confessions; he knew every one of his deeds, he was familiar with the history of his childhood. To the priest, that man was innocent, although, according to the accusation, facts were against him. Would he be able to justify himself, or rather, will he speak? This uncertainty made the priest uneasy; he wished to meet him first, to advise him, to persuade him that defence was necessary.

If they would ask him he would tell them what he thought and knew; but will they ask him, and would they listen to the only friendly voice of the priest?

That was why the vicar was perspiring thus as he looked at the road. He started on perceiving Witold.

The owner of Skomont put his hands in his pockets, and bending to the time of the waltz whistled, he looked impertinently at the priest.

'Have you ever danced?' he asked the vicar, pinching his little moustache.

'Don't you know, dear boy, that priests don't dance?' answered the vicar, kindly.

'Yes, they do! I have seen them dancing. A very pious canon lifted his cassock, and dancing, sang,—

'"Anna, zu dir mein liebsten Gang! mein bester Gang,
mein letzter Gang!
Anna, dir dien ich mein Leben lang—mein Leben,
Leben lang!"'

Here Witold raised the skirt of his coat and executed a dance of doubtful elegancy before the priest. At the same time he laughed like a madman.

'It looked all right,' said he, having finished. 'We applauded so much that the theatre trembled.'

The vicar frowned and shrugged his shoulders.

'It's not worthy of an honest man to look and to listen to such scandalous performances. We are men and there is much evil done, but there's no reason at all why such things should be shown to the public. It's as though someone were to show his wounds. Such an enjoyment is not healthy and brings no credit to those who are fond of it.'

Witold turned on his heel, and whistling again, went to the gate.

He was short-sighted, therefore he could not see anything on the road.

'Don't you see any carriage on the road?' asked he of the coachmen.

'No, sir,' answered one. 'Only there, near the crossing of the road, the young gentleman from the village is coming.'

'He is coming. What jolly news!' said he to himself. 'Perhaps we shall be able to leave this den before evening. I will go to Poswicie and make sweet eyes at that solitary turtle dove. She is rich. Come, come, we will pay you for everything.'

Despite the threat, he did not wait until his brother came nearer. He cautiously withdrew behind the first fire line. He made the priest follow him.

'You have left your guests sitting over an empty bottle,' said he to him.

'Ah! that's true. I will bring a fresh one immediately. Mark is late, but he told me yesterday that he would come.'

'Such courage on his part is praiseworthy,' said the young dandy aloud, and he added to himself: 'Go and bring the mead, so you will not have a chance to talk to him behind our backs.'

'He is coming,' said he, entering the room and seating himself on the sofa.

All stretched themselves and cleared their throats. The marshal unfolded a paper handed to him by Mrs Certwan. All

eyes looked towards the door; there was a solemn silence.

After a while the door opened, and bending his tall figure, Mark entered.

As if for the sake of contrast with the elegant gathering of his judges, he wore a home-spun jacket circled with a leather belt; his jack boots were covered with dust.

He straightened himself proudly on entering, looked at the people present and bowed slightly.

That cold and slighting greeting made all faces gloomy; they returned it by a neglectful nod.

The young man looked round again, looking for a chair, but they were all occupied, and the vicar was dusting the bottle of mead from the sand in the cellar; so Mark went to the open window, leaned against it, and turning his profile to the judges, waited for the aggression.

'We have waited for you three hours,' began the marshal. 'We doubted if you would come.'

'Well, I am here,' said he, shortly.

'Have you anything to say in defence of your shameful conduct towards your family?'

'I have not yet heard the accusation,' he replied laconically.

'You wronged them and took advantage of your situation. According to the accounts handed to me, during your administration in

Skomont you squandered ten thousand roubles of the property common to you and your family when your worthy father was still living.'

Here the priest interrupted the marshal's speech. He rushed in, breathing heavily, shook hands cordially with Mark, brought him an armchair from the other room, poured him a large glass of mead. He did not care for the solemnity of the moment.

The young man bent, kissed the old priest's hand, but neither touched the mead nor sat down. In that same position, with folded arms, looking over the heads of his judges, he stood in the light of a summer afternoon and asked quietly,—

'What more?'

'Further, during the year after your father's death, you intrigued secretly, and persuaded the merchants not to give any credit to Mrs Certwan, under the pretext that she has no right to administer the estate, and that they would lose their money. You raised all possible difficulties for her, and taking advantage of her need, you purchased piece by piece the land from the weak widow and inexperienced young man. You were not a son, but a usurer; your action was legal, but public opinion cannot approve it. Neighbours, are you of the same opinion?'

'Yes!' they answered in chorus.

Mark did not bend his head under this

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public accusation, nor did he lower his eyes. He listened frowning; several times a convulsive shiver passed through his frame, his lips moved as though he would have said something, but he refrained himself.

'Is that all?' asked he, after a while of silence, without changing his mien or voice.

The marshal's son looked at him constantly. He did not know who was guilty, he had not heard the accusation; but that man, quiet in an Olympian way, acted soothingly on his modern nervous character. A culprit or a sacrifice, he was a giant so far as self-possession was concerned. He looked far superior to that much-pitied widow, who was defended by public opinion, and to that young man, who, almost lying on the sofa, smiled impudently.

'There is still much more,' answered the marshal. 'There remain two principal accusations. During that year, notwithstanding your family's wishes, you did not want to legalise the division of the estate, according to your father's wish. The demand was just and your opposition was shameful; but acting thus, you showed no respect towards your parents and took advantage of your rights. Equally base was your taking the drafts of the estate and refusing to return them, notwithstanding your mother's and your brother's demands. A respectable nobleman does not act thus.'

The blood rushed to Mark's face, but he was not moved by such an accusation, for instead of defending himself, he turned his head to the window and smiled sadly.

During the marshal's speech the ivy moved behind the window, and there sounded a cordial and sweetly-pronounced word,—

'Wejdawutas!'

No one heard it, and no one noticed the guest among the trails of French beans and ivy, except the man exposed under the pillory of severe criticism; he trembled as though struck by a bullet, and looked out cautiously.

There, among the purple flowers, his gloomy looks met two dark eyes, burning with irritation and cordially impressed by the importance of the present moment, and the voice whispered sweetly, but with force,—

'Have you no pity for yourself that you permit them to insult you while you are silent? I have only listened a little while ago, and I tremble from indignation. You must not be of stone, but of wood.'

He smiled bitterly at this, and turning to his judges asked with changed voice, in which there began to vibrate sounds of passion, hitherto repressed by strong will,—

'What is the last accusation?'

The marshal cleared his throat, looked into the papers, turned on his chair and glanced at the people who were present in the room.

All looked down, they were gloomy and solemn. On Mrs Certwan's face two red spots were burning; the priest was trembling from uneasiness.

'The last accusation is a very delicate one, for it concerns what a man holds most dear —integrity of the name he bears. During that year, guiding your actions by abuse, you set a bad example to your brother, who has committed a deed of which we cannot approve. Pressed for money he sold the forest which belongs to your family in common. He can only be excused on account of his youth and irritation, and because he was not familiar with law. He made a mistake, but that does not justify your action. Instead of helping him, instead of explaining to him, instead of finishing the quarrel at home, you went to the law courts, you have mingled him with cheats, and without any hesitation threw a respectable name as prey to the lawyers. It was really scandalous!'

A whisper vibrating with indignation reached Mark's ear immediately after the speaker had finished.

'And you are silent? It's shameful! Speak for once in your life. You know that I respect you, and you permit me to hear such an accusation? It's unbearable! It tears my heart, it kills me! Speak. If not I will come up and answer instead of you in the American way.'

Between the trails of ivy there shone forth warm, flaming black eyes, and there could be seen the contracted, bushy eyebrows, and lips half-open with animation, beneath which appeared white teeth, as though they would like to bite and defend that wronged man.

That look and those passionate words from the young lips were contagious. Slowly, like flames, they gradually embraced the quiet features of the young man. They pushed all the blood from his heart to his head, they burned the gloomy surface of his grey eyes, they forced a stream of passionate words from the soul to the lips, they raised his chest like stormy waves. He shivered, retreated a pace, put his hand into one of his side pockets, thought that his chest would burst under the pressure of the storm caused by the insult to his feelings, by the trampling on his work, thoughts and aspirations.

'And that's all?' said he. 'Could you not find something more? Have you told me everything? The gentlemen, the judges, have heard enough. They heard that I was a thief, an intriguer, a cheat, and lastly a villain! It's enough! There are no more crimes in this world and there is not another man who could be guilty of more. I alone am capable of this! I!

'But no one has heard my voice and no one knows how I came here, to the highest court of nobility, which now takes from me

honour and reputation, and denies me the name of an honest man.

'I came here from afar, and a long time since. I was seventeen years old when duty called me from school. I was not asked whether I should like to work or if I were strong enough, I was commanded to work with my brain, with my arms, with everything. There, on this paper, my father has written a list of everything he trusted me with, and here, on this other paper, the same list was made after my father's death and signed by mother and our vicar.

'I have stolen ten thousand roubles! I have stolen the grey land to pay for my brother's and sister's studies, for my mother's travels.

'I used to steal, for I had plenty of time! The long summer days, that were like years, I spent in the fields; and the long nights, dragging like centuries, I spent over accounts.

'You have heard that I have stolen, but you have not heard how much rest I took during that ten years of my youth, and you have not heard whether I had any pleasure, whether I ever danced, and you have not heard how much of the sweat of my brow I poured into that land, how much deception I have experienced, how bitter was my life!

'No one has heard me complain! God is merciful, and He grants strength superior to misery. He gave me such strength that I

loved my land more than pleasure, more than the world, more than family or home. I loved it as much as my soul could love. I knew every step on it; during ten years I lived only for my land, we understood each other, it spoke to my heart by golden corn, by green meadows, by the dark forest. Then I promised it that no one should take it from me, except with my life.'

He was silent for a moment, but the stream once loose could not be stopped. His whole life was in that speech.

'And when my father died I became an intriguer and usurer, and took advantage of the weak. You have heard all that. But no one has heard that I wept tears of blood when I was obliged to leave my beloved land, and how it cried after me when taking leave of me. And no one saw that I took from Skomont, as my whole share, six cows, three horses, and some clothes; and no one knew that my mother's portion, given to me, was in ruin. But even then I did not complain, only for the second time I promised myself that I would not let the land go from my hands, even if I had to perish myself.

'And again God granted me great strength for work, and perseverance, so that I could almost go without sleep at all and did not need much food. I worked day and night, like an usurer, like a Jew I have done everything to get money.

'Then I was told that mother and Witold wished to mortgage the estate. Yes, it's true that I forbade the Jews to give them any money, but although you call that an intrigue and swindling, I swear to you I will never permit them to sell my land! Kill me, cut me in pieces, but I will not allow them to take my land, nor to sell the smallest portion of it. To that end I have devoted all my life.

'They say that I purchased the land from them under value. The accusation does not give any proofs, but I have them and here they are!'

With trembling hands he opened his jacket, took out a worn portfolio and laid a few sheets of paper on the table.

'On September 15th last year I purchased from mother forty acres of land, called Zwirble, for which I paid twenty-four hundred roubles —here is the receipt and the deed. On the 27th of October she again sold me thirty acres for thirteen hundred roubles. I paid my sister five thousand roubles; I lent three times five hundred roubles to mother; according to the agreement, I paid five hundred roubles rent for my sister's farm. During that year I have paid ten thousand seven hundred roubles in cash. These are my witnesses!'

He laid his sunburnt hand on the documents and breathed heavily. There was utter sadness and pain on his face. He moved his head, having noticed how the

judges began to look at these proofs of his gigantic efforts and whispered something between themselves.

Witold and Mrs Certwan grew pale. The priest offered a prayer of thanksgiving; the marshal's son, without knowing why, smiled triumphantly. Now they were all silent. Then Mark spoke again,—

'And you call me thief, intriguer and cheat? Perhaps you wonder from where I have taken that money? Ask that young man, he knows; he said that I paid with money taken from Poswicie. This was said, not by a stranger, but by him—my brother; he was the cause of making people despise an honest man; he did not try to find out the truth, but first threw mud on me. But how can he know how to get money honestly? He does not know how to work, and when he got money it was when he won playing cards. And you wanted me to teach him, to explain to him, and to help him? How could I do that? He would not go to Prussia to sell oxen, he would not go to Wilajki lake to fish, he could not stand the hard weather in winter or the rain in autumn, except for some fancy. He does not wish to work as hard as I do for that money which he needs so much. That is why he is merry and pleasant. Sorrow did not make him sour, work did not make him wild, suffering did not take from him

his good humour or his joyful disposition. That is why he is good and I am bad, he is joyful and I am gloomy. Here I am, standing before you, and you have hurled so much shame in my face that I ought not to dare to look into your eyes, I ought only to bend my head and withdraw crushed.'

He approached the window, looked to where the ivy grew, and again the blood covered his cheeks with a dark glare.

'Glory to you, hero!' came in a whisper through the window.

'No, gentlemen, I know all tortures, but I do not know and I will not know what shame is! I bent my head before you, for you are old and respectful, but I am not ashamed, and I am not afraid to look into your eyes.

'What do they want of me? They say I have stolen, here are the documents proving that it is false; that I took advantage of them, here are the accounts; that I have appropriated the drafts of the estate—why should I do that? I know my land like my soul, and the plans are in my father's study in Skomont, only they did not care to trouble themselves to find them. Let someone go there and he will find them in the chest of drawers.

'They wish to divide the estate—ask them what for? Do I object to their improving the land? Do I interfere with

their administration? Neither by deed nor word did I trouble them. I have respected father's division of the estate, only I took care that his bequest should remain in our hands. I guarded it, for I know how dear is our father's land and what might there is in it. And that is my only sin, of that alone I am guilty!

'Therefore I am not ashamed to look straight into your eyes, for you yourselves have become grey and bent from toil on the land! The care of it has made wrinkles on your foreheads. I looked at you and followed yours and our forefathers' example, and as I have acted till now so shall I act in the future, or I should consider myself a good-for-nothing.

'For the idea of defending the land I have given up studies, freedom and pleasures. So many years I have spent in hard work in order to realise my dreams, and you think that now I shall give up what I have conquered?

'They wish to divide the estate. I know why they wish it, and I shall not give my consent. Take the blood out of my veins, tear me in pieces, but do not ask me to grant them that by which my land would be exposed to pass into other hands.'

He stopped and waited. There was no work, no torture which could have exhausted him more than that first confession, more than did that one speech.

There was some confused murmuring amongst the judges. The marshal looked at the ground, Mr Ilnich wiped the perspiration from his face with a handkerchief, old Rymwid, grave and thoughtful, looked into the face of the accused man and twisted his moustache, Olechnowich and Radwilowich approached their heads and whispered something, while the marshal's son rose from the sofa on which he had been seated beside Witold and went hesitatingly towards Mark. As for the latter, tired and breathing quickly, he was biting his lips till they bled, whilst his whole body trembled. Through the window a whisper flew to him with an accent of warm emotion,—

'Now you are spotless! Now you can be silent. No one will be able to prove you guilty. Come quick—I am waiting for you.'

He nodded and turned his eyes to the room, for at that moment Mrs Certwan began to talk in a voice full of despair and complaint.

'Gentlemen! Why should not my son Witold be allowed to do what he pleases with his own property? It belongs to him and he is of age. It's nobody's business what he should do. It's constant abuse and violence. We don't need any advice, we know for ourselves what is right and what is not. We shall be able to keep the land.'

Mr Rymwid had risen from his chair, and

pointing to the receipts scattered over the table, asked laconically,—

'And what is this? this is how you administer and keep the land. Only one year, and already so much.'

'He tempted us with money, he persuaded us to sell the land.'

Mark had no need to deny this, for Mr Ilnich explained,—

'Excuse me, madam, but I myself was a witness when you went to Mark at Poswicie to ask him for money. I had gone to see him on some business and I heard your conversation from the other room.'

'Father had forbidden him to meddle in our affairs. Father knew him and was afraid of his horrid character,' said the stepmother.

The priest could not stand this any longer, he sprang from his chair.

'You must not speak in that way about the dead man!' exclaimed he. 'He knew and respected Mark; the best proof of it was, that he entrusted him with Poswicie, and blessed him for his noble obedience. I was there and remember it well. He told Witold not to contract debts and not to lead a dissipated life. He was right in that too.

'Gentlemen, I know Mark Certwan well; he has grown and worked under my eyes. He is sinful, as we all are sinful, but he has not done that of which they accuse him, for he is not false, he is not cunning, and he is not a villain.

'He is reserved, suspicious and rough, but he is noble-hearted, and he has never neglected any of his duties. Appearances are deceitful, but you must look deeper; listen to his soul, and consider what he has told you. He does not lie!'

'It is a great sin in our country to sell the land,' muttered old Olechnowich.

'And it is a shame not to be able to keep it through laziness and dissipation,' added his brother.

Here the marshal looked at Mrs Certwan indignantly, gathered the papers and pushed them aside contemptuously.

There was a long, unpleasant silence, interrupted by the widow's sobbing and the priest's breathing. The judges did not know what to do. They would have preferred not to be in the presence of the proud, quiet young giant, whose voice resounded again as before —it was muffled and gloomy.

'Gentlemen, I beg that the verdict may be given.'

They looked at each other; at length old Rymwid approached Mark, and putting his hand on his shoulder, said, smiling,—

'Young man, I have grandsons as old as you are, and I came here determined to scold you as a father scolds his son. But the result is such that, as it seems, we have to apologise. Well, it's hard, but I beg your pardon; yet, speaking frankly, you have brought this

trouble upon yourself. It's a sin to avoid people and not give them a chance of knowing you better. It's not very pleasant for an old man to ask forgiveness from a youth, but, notwithstanding that, I am glad I made your acquaintance. Well, give me your laborious hand, and don't look so gloomy. I shall send you my boys, you will teach them how to become such a man as you are Don't forget to come and see me.'

Mark bowed respectfully to the old man.

'I have not given a black ball,' said Ilnich. 'You will always find a sincere friend in me.'

'We came here not knowing what the question was,' said one of the Olechnowichs.

The marshal was sitting on thorns. He alone had no excuse whatever, for he had accused severely and pitilessly. Never in his life had his position as a chairman of the nobility been so unpleasant as on that day.

He looked once more through the papers, thought for a while and said,—

'Gentlemen, I cannot deny that the whole affair was represented to me falsely, but I did not know the defendant at all. I am very sorry, but the experience of my life has taught me that there is not a man either completely innocent or entirely guilty.

'There are some drawbacks in the most noble characters and good points in the worst. Therefore I propose the following decision: the division of the estate shall be postponed

for one year from to-day. During that time Mr Mark will give his brother complete freedom of action, and he will neither lend him money nor purchase land from him. After one year we will look through the accounts, and either Mr Witold will buy of his brother, and in that case Mr Mark will give up his rights, or, in case of the necessity of selling the land, Mr Mark Certwan will be able to demand that the land shall not be sold to anyone else, but to him alone, on the conditions agreed beforehand. Do you accept my proposition?'

'Yes, it's not bad. Mr Witold is young, he may behave well,' said Mr Rymwid, looking at the student.

A cynical smile twisted Witold's face; he put his lips as if he wished to whistle, but he refrained from doing so, and only gaped.

Mrs Certwan was silent.

'So let it be,' agreed all, surrounding the table to sign the decision.

'Do you agree also?' asked the marshal, turning towards the window.

But no one answered him.

Whilst, after shaking hands with Mark, the judges called by the chairman returned to their seats, Miss Irene Orwid's graceful figure suddenly appeared in the window. She looked in and stretched out both her hands to the young man. Her lovely face smiled and beamed with joy whilst she said cordially,—

'Here is my gigantic white ball.'

Mark blushed and bowed, holding her little hands; thus they stood for a while looking into each other's eyes.

The marshal asked in vain. Certwan did not hear, did not pay any attention.

In that moment he did not care for anything else.

Surprised at the silence, they all turned, and great excitement arose in the room.

The priest rushed first to greet the young lady; Witold, having forgotten the whole affair, made a profound bow; Mrs Certwan wiped away her tears and stopped sobbing. The other gentlemen, knowing the young lady only by sight, bowed from afar, looking at her critically.

She drew general attention to herself and excited great interest, but she was not in the least embarrassed, she answered the greetings with a nod, but the light disappeared from her features and the joy retreated in the depth of her eyes.

'No, thank you very much,' answered she to the priest, who had invited her to come in. 'I only came for a minute on business.'

Here she turned to Mark, and asked,—

'Is Mr Ragis with you?'

'No, madam, he is in the village.'

'What a pity! I have brought him a present.'

Saying this, she put on the window-sill some round object wrapped in a fine handkerchie.

'May I see what it is?' asked Witold, sweetly.

'Yes, but you must be careful, for it pricks.'

'A hedgehog,' cried the student.

'The old man will be pleased,' laughed the priest.

'What a peculiar fancy,' said Mrs Certwan, sneeringly.

Irene Orwid spoke joyfully, and turned to the silent Mark.

'I went to take a walk to-day, and I found this little animal in the grass under Devaytis. I took it, thinking it might be a substitute for Mr Ragis's burnt pet.'

'I thank you very much! I will carry it to godfather,' said he, putting out his hands for the hedgehog.

'No, we will leave it here under our parson's care, and you shall come with me. I am sure you can leave now, for everything is over.'

Consequently she had been there, behind the window, and she had heard everything. Mrs Certwan nearly fainted, Witold grew pale, he lost his countenance. Now, for the first time, he was ashamed and humble.

'I am at your service in a moment,' answered Mark, approaching the chairman.

Those who stood at the window were so embarrassed that they did not know what to say, and Irene did not deign to begin a conversation. Mrs Certwan came to her senses first.

'Has Mr Marwitz gone?' she asked, making an effort to smile sweetly.

'Yes,' answered the young lady, bending and caressing Margas, who, lying near the window, waited for his master.

'I am sure you must feel very lonesome in our country,' began Witold.

'No, I am very busy. I have no time to be lonesome,' said she, coolly, not looking at him.

'What a repulsive dog,' cried he. 'And he is wounded too! Are you not afraid to touch him?'

'It's Mr Mark's dog,' said Irene; 'he comes to Poswicie every day. He was burnt, poor thing, in the fire, watching his master's property. I am very fond of him.'

She caressed the animal, and looked into the room.

Mark was signing the decision, surrounded by respectable noblemen, who presented to him their explanatory excuses.

'May I depart?' he asked the chairman.

'We can all depart,' answered he.

The marshal's son came to Mark,—

'May I shake hands with you also, although we don't know each other much? May it be the beginning of our friendship. You have

taught me more to-day than I have learned in schools or at the university; pray be my friend and master. I shall see you soon.'

They all took leave of the priest and went to the front of the vicarage. The carriages came one by one. In that moment Witold approached Irene and said quietly, with supplication in his voice,—

'Will you permit me also to accompany you?'

She shook her head, and, putting her hand under Mark's arm, as if searching a defence against an aggressor, she said,—

'No, thank you. We have many important things to talk about; it wouldn't amuse you.'

She nodded carelessly in answer to his profound bow, and went away on foot along the dusty road; she did not care at all what they might say about her.

They were a strange couple. He, like a peasant who had become rough through hard work; she, like a princess from a fairy tale, beautiful and delicate. What could they have in common?

After walking a moment in silence she began first, as usual,—

'That court of honour was the last dragon, my Wejdawutas. The monster is conquered, it lies without teeth, while the generals are in dust. Why are you still gloomy? What more do you want?'

'I am always thus,' he whispered, his customary answer.

'No, you know how to talk, to feel, and to attract people to you! I have only known you to-day, and I ask you for the second time, what more do you want?'

She challenged him, she went to meet that stubborn soul, she begged him to submit to her willingly. But the eruption had passed; the volcano was silent, steel armour again covered his chest.

'I don't want anything,' answered he.

She looked at him sharply.

'The priest said that you never lied. Would you tell me that in confession you tell the truth in the same way as you speak to me now?'

'I should not tell my confessor what I felt if there were no sin in my feelings. Human misery and sorrow only God should know, for He alone can help.'

'But one mustn't lie in any case. Look into my eyes and repeat that there is nothing you wish for.'

He was silent, pressing his lips together, he shut his soul still more carefully, he was unrelenting in his obstinacy.

She laughed mirthfully.

'I have proved the falsehood to you. For the present I am satisfied with that slight triumph, and I don't insist any more. Are you satisfied with their decision?'

'I had expected worse. Had I been silent they would have given sentence against me.'

'Do you not see then that it was wise to listen to me? Now, every time I advise you to speak, you must obey, and I guarantee you good results. Do you agree?'

For answer he only smiled.

'What do you propose doing during that year of trial?' asked she, after a while.

'The same as ever. Make money and buy Witold's debts from the Jews, for they won't permit me to buy the land. The result will be the same, only it will be a greater bother.'

'You have no other project?'

'I don't know yet. Count Komar wishes me to administer his estate; he is going abroad. If I can find time and strength I shall accept his propositions.'

'How much you love money! You would be willing to give your soul for it!'

'Not my soul, but I would give my blood for it!'

'How strange! It's a mania. What do you need so much money for? To give blood for money! It's not happiness. It's not peace.'

'For me it is both.'

'It's not like you. But suppose you were as rich as Crœsus, what would you do hen with that burden?'

He looked at the sky, opened his mouth, but did not say what he had wished.

'Why talk about that which cannot be?' he muttered.

'It doesn't do any harm; at anyrate you are on the way to riches, and I am sure you will get what you wish. Have you ever given up any of your aspirations? I am sure, never.'

'Yes, I did,' said he, gloomily.

'It's impossible! You turned from the road? I can't believe that! And why? The obstacles were too great?'

'No, the purpose was too small,' said he.

'Ah, yes, I know about that. Mr Ragis told me, once when we were sitting under the oak, you gave up your bride and you despaired exceedingly.'

'What can godfather know about my despair? When I gave up I did not despair. There was no God's will—that's all.'

'But now she is a widow. You can return to her.'

'Yes, I can.'

'Then, in a year from now, you can purchase Skomont and marry,' said she, ironically.

He hung his head, his features grew harder and harder; he looked gloomily on the road. If he had to die for it he would not tell her what he felt; she should not hear one word of it from him.

'May God bring you all happiness,' said

she, smiling. 'I am sorry that I shall not be at your wedding, for it's probable that I shall leave this country.'

Mark was astonished, and, looking at her attentively, asked,—

'Are you going far? For long?'

'In the autumn I shall return to America. Old Mr Marwitz is alone, partly on my account, and he writes despairing letters. I must console him and keep him company. I don't know for how long, maybe for ever. Would you not buy Poswicie?'

He became white like a ghost, his arm trembled.

'You are joking,' said he. 'You don't intend to sell, and I can't purchase. And you will remain.'

'It's very doubtful. Whom and what have I here? You are a hero, another Wejdawutas, consequently longing and soltitude in a large dreary house are inaccessible to your soul. But I can't get accustomed to it, nothing can replace for me a fireplace, a friendly word, a kind look, all this I have in my adopted home in Drake City. You will not be able to understand me, for you are above these paltry things; you don't need all that, but I am not created to be an anchorite, and my aim and views in life are quite different to yours.'

It seemed as though he had heard but

one thing, for he murmured as if speaking to himself,—

'Then you are going away, and perhaps for ever?'

'I hope there is nothing strange in that? What would you do if you were in my place?'

'I should remain.'

'To be solitary throughout the whole of your life?'

'Before a year is over you will know all the neighbours. It's not necessary to go to America to find friends. You will marry . . .'

'Very willingly; for then I shouldn't even need to make any new acquaintances. My choice was made a long time ago. Will you guarantee me that the man I have selected will accept my hand? Then I will remain.'

'Perhaps you have chosen such . . .'

She shook her head impatiently and frowned.

'Better be silent this time, for you will not be able to deceive either me or yourself with words. Why this deceit? In America they don't bring the women up to be passive as they do in this country; we are taught that we are equal to you, that we are independent. I hate the turn our conversation takes; it's false and unworthy of the subject. I never conceal my sentiments, for they are neither sinful nor improper.'

She raised her head proudly, and, looking intently into his eyes, said after a short pause,—

'We can't change our destiny, Wejdawutas; you know well that I love you, and I don't need your avowal to learn that you love me. . . . Why should we torture ourselves if we can be happy?'

In his eyes there appeared a cloud of despair. He hung his head and became deathly pale.

She smiled radiantly, she looked steadily into his eyes and said with great cordiality,—

'If I am mistaken you had better contradict me. Do you not love me? Perhaps not as much as you love Zmudz, but I am sure more than you love the rest of humanity.'

He drew himself up, and, looking at her reproachfully, said softly,—

'Why did you wish to know the truth? And why add one more, the greatest sorrow I could bear? My life is bitter enough without it.'

'That is why I spoke first; for you, with your strange opinions, would suffer and be silent for ages, and . . . would make me suffer also. And what for?'

They did not notice that they stood in the glade and beneath Devaytis.

The sun descended low, throwing a scarlet glow over trees, earth and sky. The old

oak moved. It was a long time since he had seen his defender.

The old patriarch of the oak grove wondered that the young man did not greet him, but stopped in the distance and looked into the girl's face.

'What for?' he repeated her question. 'Because between you and me there is an abyss which I cannot fill up, even if I were to throw my life into it. Therefore I stopped on its brink, and although some power in that direction attracted me, I did not go there and I will not go! In fairy tales, shepherds marry princesses, but that should not be done in real life.

'God sent me this trial; it's true I love you, and I don't know when and how it happened. But I was silent and suffered, and would have continued to suffer.'

She grew red as a cherry, and looked into his face, smiling.

'And what would have been the result of your peculiar proceeding had you fallen in love with a European girl, who knows only how to be silent, to suffer and to wait? What would have become of our happiness? What would our lives have been worth continually combating that noble and true sentiment? It's so delightful to have someone in this world, to dream of him, to love him, and you wish to crush that sentiment in yourself?

'Where do you see an abyss and torture? I am so happy now, and you ought to feel the same. Here is my hand; you may kiss it and keep it for ever. . . .'

He shook his head and retreated a few paces.

'I can't do it! Love is not a sin; but I am not fit to become your husband. I will serve you, and will give my life for you if it be necessary, but I don't want your riches. I can't go to Poswicie and live there at your expense, for then the people would call me a villain, and they would be right! You wonder that I am greedy for money and that I call the possession of it a blessing. I want money, not for the sake of being powerful; I would throw it into the abyss that separates us, and then, equal to you, I would fall at your feet, asking you for happiness and peace! Otherwise I can't, I don't want! . . .'

.'Where is your common sense? Then because of gossip you trample upon our hearts and our happiness. Then vain pride is stronger in you than love! . . . You ought to be ashamed! Riches! Who has gathered them? Through whose work, toil and care am I rich? Have I added one penny to it? And why should I suffer because I am richer than you? Why should we care for people? Shame on you!'

'There would be if I were to surrender,' answered he in a hard voice.

Everything was raging within her; her eyes flashed sparks, her lips trembled.

'Then you reject my hand and heart because I am rich? Then, for that reason, we have to silence our hearts and separate as though we were strangers to each other, and not to meet again? To suffer for a paltry reason, to live without a smile, without any consolation, without a friendly hand, alone, deprived of love and happiness? And you call that great love on your part? . . .

'Do you realise that in this moment you have risked everything, that you have offended me mortally, refusing my hand, slighting my love? Think, what bitterness would have remained for us both had my pride been stronger than my love, as it is in your case! The possession of a treasure would not help you in the least, and you would fall at my feet in vain! In revenge I would kick you, in order to satisfy my vain pride! We should be most miserable because of our pride! You set me such an example.

'But I have not your pride, for I love you too much. I shall pay you back, but in a different fashion. I know that your mother died when you were still very young, that your family was hard on you, and that, consequently, no one has taught you how to love. You don't know what the longing of

the heart is, what a torture uneasiness about a beloved person is, therefore you think it's possible to get the better of love, as one does of hard work and fatigue. You think that you can get along without love, as you can without food and sleep.

'I know all about that, and therefore I forgive you, for I pity you very much. Your own heart will avenge me; you will be punished for your pride and your refusal of my hand. You don't want me, and I am going, but I sha'n't change, I shall wait for you. When you are sad and longing, come boldly. I shall be very happy to see you. Only then I shall know that you love me well! *Au revoir* then.'

She nodded slightly, and departed humming a song. She was sure that she had won the battle. She was not deceived by his gloomy and apparently indifferent look; she was already able to read it.

She looked back after a while; he followed her at a little distance.

'Where are you going?'

'I . . .' stammered he, not knowing what to answer. 'I shall only see . . . The stream in the river is very swift . . . there are many whirlpools . . .'

'What! you are already greatly concerned about me? Did I not tell you it would be so? Why should you care if I drown? I am neither your bride nor your wife.'

He was silent, but he still followed her. They stopped on the bank; the boat was rocked by the waves, but the boatman was not there; there was only one oar.

'Did you come alone?' asked he, frightened.

'Yes. I know how to row. In America I used to beat Mr Marwitz. You had better return home after such a troublesome day. Good-bye.'

Instead of leaving her, he unfastened the boat, pulled it as near as he could to the shore, and extended his hand to help her in.

'First give me the oar,' said she.

He shook his head negatively.

'I shall go with you. I am afraid of an accident. Pray get in.'

She jumped into the boat, smiling, full of joyful happiness.

'Why should you care about me? What would you do if I had a fancy to go in that boat to the River Niemen? And if I go to America the ocean is larger and more dangerous to cross! In the meantime you may row. I am glad you are learning how to love. . . .'

She sat opposite him. The wind tossed her dark hair, a hearty and, at the same time, irritating smile parted her coral lips, her eyes were shining with animation and warm love.

For a while she was silent, looking at the ripples made by the oar, then she glanced at

the sky, then on the shore, and sighed deeply.

'I would go far in your silent company. We could think individually and not go beyond this boat. There is neither Poswicie here nor riches, nor that dreadful abyss about which I have heard from you. Don't look so gloomy. Better tell me what you are thinking of now? I am sure you are thinking of some song, as I am.'

'I don't know how to sing.'

'I will teach you, and many other beautiful things. To reward you for rowing I will sing to you.'

He bent over the boat and rowed still faster; he would have liked to run away from her and from the intoxicating melody of Gounod's song which she hummed. But Dubissa wanted to make him drink the cup of torment to the dregs. The stream was strong, and it was difficult to gain the shore. At length, tired, he succeeded in reaching the park of Poswicie; he pushed the boat on the sand, sprang out and helped her to alight.

'Thank you. Are you going back with the boat?'

'Yes. I will send it back to-morrow.'

'Then good-night and *au revoir*.'

They shook hands; he hesitated, but suddenly he bent humbly forward and kissed the hand which he had not accepted.

'I thank you, and beg you to pardon me,' whispered he.

'I am not angry and shall wait for you.'

He sprang into the boat and pushed it out into the deep.

'Wejdawutas!' a mirthful voice called after him, 'return soon!'

There was no answer; the splash of the waves against the sides of the boat alone could be heard.

Irene looked thoughtful for a long time.

'Can anyone explain why he is dearer to me than the whole world?' she whispered, raising her eyebrows, then she returned home.

CHAPTER XI

WHITE threads of spider web and cold autumn fog rested over Sandwile.

The grass covered Gral's grave mound, new events had made people forget the sad man ; all traces of the fire had disappeared. The white walls of the new house had risen and were surmounted by new thatched roof ; there was also a new hedge.

The neighbours looked and wondered, perhaps they were a trifle envious, they were certainly more persuaded that Ragis was a sorcerer.

And, indeed, how could it be otherwise than by a charm that that crowd of men were working at the buildings ?

They would not accept money, worked joyfully all day long, and on going home towards evening filled the village with merry songs, as though they were coming from a wedding. Were they not charmed ?

Consequently the neighbours and noblemen began also to help, so that they might find favour with Ragis, who was pompous as a peacock and hummed continually.

Mark, as usual, did not meddle with details, but left everything to Rymko. He was seldom seen in the village—he only came from time to time for a short visit, like a guest. Miss Aneta took advantage of these moments to give him something to eat, to press him to her breast, and to repair his clothes; Ragis was glad to have a moment's chat, and Grenis to feed the road-wearied horses.

Mark remained a while, smoked a pipe, gave some orders or advice, kissed the hands of the old people, then getting into his carriage drove away.

It was autumn—a busy time for industrious people and merchants; Mark was both.

Different business affairs obliged him to travel from one end of the country to the other. He had purchased a great number of oxen, hired six more water-mills, and he now controlled the flour and grain business. Young Downar from the village, who had replaced Gral, did everything Mark told him, with blind faith in the superior intelligence of his master.

Through him the inhabitants of the village knew what Certwan was doing; they wondered, and when they met him saluted him respectfully. He set them a good example, and they were proud of him.

One day Mark came to his farm. Notwithstanding his great strength, two months of

continual travelling and hard work had greatly changed him. He had become dark and thin, his eyes had sunk still deeper and were red from sleepless nights. His lips were burning with fever, there were a few more wrinkles on his forehead, and his whole figure told that he was exhausted.

As the house was not ready they slept in the barn. Ragis made him a bed of scented hay, his aunt prevailed on him to drink a potion prepared from the wonder-working pimpernel, and they told him to sleep, to rest at least for a week.

The cocks were crowing for the first time when the old man was awakened by a rustling of the hay.

'What, you don't sleep?' he asked.

'No, father, I can't.'

'What is the matter with you? What troubles you?'

'Nothing.'

'Perhaps you have unwillingly wronged someone, and now you remember it? In such a case a man can't sleep.'

'I should remember if I had wronged anyone, I would return immediately and repair the wrong.'

'Perhaps some bad thought came to your mind; a bad thought also prevents sleep. Recite a prayer. It may relieve you. . . .'

The old man was alarmed, and believing in such help, began to recite,—

'Holy Virgin, full of grace, have mercy upon us sinners.'

And Mark repeated it after him in a warm, beseeching whisper.

When they had said 'Amen' the old man, being sure of the good result to follow, wrapped himself in his blanket and began to snore.

But from Mark's bed there still resounded a low murmuring of prayer, full of deep sadness.

At daybreak Ragis got up, intending to leave the barn quietly so as not to disturb Mark, but, to his great surprise, he noticed that his bed was empty; he looked into the courtyard.

Mark was sitting on a log, smoking a pipe as the old man had taught him, and looking into the cloud of smoke; the cold dew was glistening on his clothes.

'You are here already? Why did you get up so early?' said he, dissatisfied.

'It's not my habit to rest long in bed. The night is long enough.'

Yes, that sleepless night had been very long to him, but he said nothing more, only began to talk about the building.

That subject absorbed Ragis's attention and interrupted his scolding.

When the carpenters came, Mark took an axe and worked with them; despite his aunt's entreaties and the cripple's exclamation, he worked as hard as if he were earning his daily bread.

The veins on his hands and forehead swelled, the perspiration streamed down his face, but he did not stop, he worked on until evening.

That day was Saturday, and the workmen were more zealous before the day of rest, they spoke but little, and the axes still resounded at dusk.

Suddenly a strange voice was heard at the gate,—

'May Jesus Christ be blessed!'

Mark raised his head, this time the axe did not strike the wood.

The land-steward of Poswicie was there on horseback. He did not notice Mark in the crowd of workmen, and turned to Ragis,—

'Is our young lady here?' asked he, eagerly.

'I haven't seen her for two months.'

'And Mr Mark, is he here?'

'I am here. What is the matter?' said he, throwing down his axe and coming nearer.

'Have you not met our lady to-day?'

'No! What has happened?'

'Something bad, sir! She left the *château* in the morning and hasn't returned yet!'

'Where did she go?'

'No one knows! The boat is not in its place, but it may have been carried away by the river. I sent mounted messengers to all the farms and came here myself.'

Mark looked round as though he had become crazy, he trembled in all his limbs;

without asking any more questions he rushed out of the gate.

'What can have happened to her?' said Ragis. 'She is such a brave girl. There are no bandits here, and she could not lose her way. At anyrate I am going to search for her also.'

'We will go with you,' cried the peasants from Poswicie. 'May God preserve our young lady from any accident!'

They followed the land-steward; Ragis hobbled last. Miss Aneta called him.

'With God's help, everything will end well; but our boy in his grief went without coat and cap. Take them for him and console him a little. I would go with you, but I am not strong enough. Tell him not to despair in vain. Poor boy!'

'I will tell him, but shall I reach him with my wooden leg?' muttered the old man, going as swiftly as he could.

No one reached Mark. He was urged by a stronger power than that which moved the servants, peasants and Ragis. He reached Poswicie first. Everyone there was alarmed; all faces were sorrowful. They had searched the farms and roads in vain; Irene Orwid had disappeared without leaving any trace.

Like a ghost of despair, Mark rushed off without coat or cap; he did not need to be told that their efforts had been vain, grief was depicted on every face.

He did not stop.

'Bring a light and follow me!' commanded he, and rushed to the river.

A few moments later several pieces of resinous pine wood and lanterns lighted up the shore, where the boat was generally fastened. It was not there.

Mark began to search for traces. There were several, evidently left by the people who had searched there before. Amongst them he noticed the print of a small foot—it was going in the direction of the river.

Out of breath, trembling, and bathed with perspiration, he stretched himself.

'Boat!' cried he, so loud that everyone moved.

In one minute five boats were ready. He sprang into the first, stuck the piece of burning wood in the front of the boat, seized the oar and off they went.

Meanwhile, the night was coming on, white as milk, and the fog, freezing the marrow in their bones, hung over the country.

At a short distance nothing could be seen but a thick mist, in which the torches shone like sparks. At last they also disappeared. The thick night stopped the search on land. And then, throughout the long day, they had searched the country carefully—only the merciless, treacherous, and always secret river remained to be searched.

The peasants went home, promising to

return the next day with nets and search for the body; Ragis, the land-steward, and several of the oldest servants sat in Sawgard's room moaning, and talking over the event. The young servants were with Mark in the boat.

'Have you searched in Devaytis?' asked the cripple.

'We have searched everywhere,' said the old employee. 'We have looked under every bush and in every opening of the subterranean passages.'

'Have you been in that marshy hazel-nut thicket?'

'Yes.'

'Then she must have been drowned! Our Dubissa takes so many sacrifices every year. Do you remember the vicar's nephew, old Butwil, and Kantrymas's wife with a child? Why did you let her go alone?'

'O Lord! O Lord!' lamented Sawgard, tearing his hair, 'and I have lived to see such an end! And she was so joyful, so kind and so intelligent! We loved her already, and she had become accustomed to us, as though we had lived together for a century. We were so glad when she came; we received her so heartily, and tried so hard to please her. And all for what?'

'It's a pity,' said Ragis, 'that she died so young. There is no help against God's will. If one puts a wall round one's self death will jump over it.'

'Let us go out and see if Mr Certwan is not coming back,' said Sawgard.

'He will not return till he is unable to breathe,' muttered the cripple, sadly.

'Yes,' said the land-steward, pitifully, 'I thought, too, that they were fond of each other. I have looked at them with pleasure when they were walking together, and I have blessed them secretly. Merciful Lord, take this punishment from us!'

He wiped away his tears with the sleeve of his coat and became silent. Ragis muttered something indistinctly.

No one thought of going to bed. From time to time one of them looked out, put some wood on the fire and sighed. No one came from the river.

Towards morning they heard swift footsteps in the courtyard. The door opened, Mark stood on the threshold.

There was not one dry thread in his clothes, his hair was dishevelled, in his hand he held a piece of burning resinous wood and half of a broken oar.

He was blue from cold and damp, but notwithstanding that the perspiration was flowing down his cheeks, he looked wildly, awefully; there was a fathomless despair in his eyes; he moved his lips several times before he could say the one word,—

'Net!'

They asked no question. Sawgard, weep-

ing, went to execute the order. Ragis put his hand under Mark's arm.

'Drink some whisky or you may become sick. Put on your coat, warm yourself up. It is God's will!'

The young man pulled his arm away angrily and went out, looking wrathfully on the cripple; he set his teeth till they grated, but did not say a word.

The servants took the enormous net and returned to the boats; he sat in the smallest boat and went ahead with that sad work.

They plunged the net for the first time, and it embraced the river from one shore to the other. They pulled it slowly, pausing for breath.

There was plenty of fish, but no Irene! They dragged again.

Day was breaking the clouds of fog.

There were a hundred boats on the river, for the peasants had come with theirs; a great crowd had gathered on both shores; the air was filled with women's weeping and with the calls of the oarsmen; the sad news spread all over the villages surrounding Poswicie.

Amidst that crowd of people, amidst the sobbing and crying, a solitary oarsman stood in a small boat—he was motionless and mute, insensitive as a piece of wood. Only, every time they pulled the net, his features contracted spasmodically and a shiver ran through

his frame, whilst everyone on the shores was silent. Besides fish, the net brought nothing.

Towards noon they stopped near the water-mill of Jurgisk; they had lost all hope of finding the body.

They had once searched in the same way for Olechno's body. Dubissa was not accustomed to give up its prey.

Mark dropped the oar and looked with his deep, sunken eyes on the grey sky covered with clouds; he was looking above for consolation for his soul.

The people were hungry and cold, they dropped their hands. At that moment someone emerged from the crowd and called,—

'Mark!'

The giant looked towards the shore; there stood the Rev. Michael Nerpalis, and behind him Ragis and Miss Aneta.

'Come to me, my dear boy,' said the vicar. 'Come!'

After a moment of hesitation the young man, being accustomed to obey the vicar, came to the shore and landed.

He could hardly keep his feet, he leaned heavily on the oar.

'Try to control your grief, have pity on yourself,' began the priest, kindly. 'We can do nothing against God's will. The people are tired, let them rest. And you come with me, I command you!'

He took him by the hand, and Mark followed him without resistance.

This last misfortune had crushed him physically and morally.

On the road Grenis was waiting with a carriage. Mark was told to get in, and he obeyed; the priest and his aunt accompanied him. Ragis remained to give some orders.

They came to the vicarage, they seated him by the fireplace in a warm room; Miss Aneta wiped the water from his face. He let them do everything, he said not a word, he touched neither food nor drink.

When they insisted, he shook his head and looked into the flames thoughtlessly, obstinately. They could not find one word for that quiet, intense despair.

The old woman's lips moved, reciting a prayer; the vicar walked to and fro and sighed.

After an hour Mark arose and went towards the door. They stopped him.

'Where are you going? Stay!' they said.

He looked at them in utter grief.

'Have pity on me! I can't remain sitting! Let me go, I must go!'

The vicar wanted to stop him, but Miss Aneta pulled him by the sleeve, and said,—

'Let him go! let him go! Don't be afraid, he will not do himself any harm, he has a Christian soul. But grief is tearing his heart; let him go, perhaps God will help him! Perhaps he will weep!'

Mark went out. Then only the old woman remembered she had let him go without a coat. She rushed after him, but could not see him.

He went swiftly along the same road by which, on the day of his trial, he conducted Irene. He was followed by his dog Margas, and by despair, for the charming, good-hearted girl, who with such confidence and joy had given him her heart, was now lying in cold water.

Had he humbled his pride she would be living now, happy and safe; he would have defended her, he would rather have died himself; she would have smiled on him, she would have made his life bright, and supported him in all his struggles.

He had refused, and God had punished him, crushed him, had shown him the misery of the triumph of his pride!

Who will sustain him now, who will rescue him? Who will put a hand on his bleeding heart and say 'Peace to you?'

Devaytis was standing on the glade, weeping for the summer days. The chirping birds have left it, and the eagle's family is scattered over the world, whilst the cold autumn wind plucked leaf after leaf from its clothes and threw them on the ground, like rays of gold and scarlet.

Mark sank on the moss and withered fern, and moaned for the first time; the oak became

silent seeing his grief, and it seemed that it asked him compassionately: 'Who has wronged thee? Who? The people? Brothers? Don't weep, for you work not for them alone. Bad people will pass, but you will remain strong as a giant. . . .'

The muffled, penetrating moaning did not cease. That giant was lying like a worm and was suffering.

'What ails you? What? Have they taken from you the land and the house? What ails you? . . .'

But the broken-down man could only answer with a moan: 'Lord have mercy upon me!'

The tree must have understood that moan, for it moved still more.

'God has a right to punish you, for He is Father and Lord! If He has laid His hand upon you, you can't help it by your own will alone. Ask Him for mercy, as I ask Him for summer and sun, and He never refuses me! I am dying, but I believe in the resurrection! I believe! I believe!'

'Lord, Lord have mercy upon me!' repeated the man.

And for a moment everything became silent. The oak stood motionless and gloomy, and the poor hero lay on the ground speechless, not having strength even to complain.

Suddenly, through that quiet night, resounded the distant barking of a dog. A

while later, Margas, panting, rushed along the glade to his master's feet.

Mark was indifferent to every sound from without. The dog touched him, began to scratch his shoulder with his paw, to lick his hands; at length he sat by his head and whined and barked continuously.

That moved the unfortunate man and reminded him of life. He had been here a long time; evening had already come. He arose with difficulty; he was frozen, he shivered, only his head was burning.

He looked round, collecting his thoughts. He did not remember where he was; it was long ere he came to his senses, he looked at the dog, his only friend in every happiness and misfortune.

'Margas, she is no more,' whispered he. 'Everything is gone, still one must live. How?'

The dog put his fore-paws on his chest and whined as though he had understood; then he ran several paces, looked back, and called him by barking.

Mark shivered. Why did he call him? Where does he wish to lead him? Perhaps he has found in the willow that for which they have searched in vain—her body?

That thought urged him forward, and the dog, satisfied that he was understood, ran, looking back continually and whimpering impatiently.

He did not lead him to the river, but to the centre of the oak grove, to the thicket of blackberry and raspberry bushes, so difficult to penetrate, in which there were a number of half-rotten trunks of trees, overturned a long time ago by a storm.

Occasionally Margas lost the scent, but he got it again, and Mark followed him, jumping like a roe-buck over obstacles, heedless of the thorny bushes that wounded his hands and tore his clothes. The dusk made the way still more difficult.

Margas was homely and wicked. He never permitted anyone to touch him, his master alone might do that; very often he was hungry, for Mark, always busy, had not time to take good care of him; even Ragis attributed a bad penchant to him, and, except a scolding, did not give him anything. But that grey, thin, shaggy-haired, wild-looking animal had a good memory.

He had not forgotten the dainty hands of the young lady who, not being frightened by his bad look, sometimes caressed his shaggy coat, full of thistles and dust; he remembered that in Poswicie she used to give him bread and butter, and that once she had given him some sandwiches. Margas had noted all that in his faithful heart, and could scent her track well. Consequently he turned round and round in the thicket, found the trail, and conducted his master where he wished.

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Suddenly he stopped and barked triumphantly, looking into an opening, half covered with trails of climbing plants, overgrown as in some southern covert.

Mark knelt and pulled out some thorny trails with his hands, for it seemed to him that at the bottom he heard some moaning.

It was a dark, deep opening to one of the subterranean passages of the old castle. The dusk grew thicker and thicker every moment. The imagination of the people had filled these secret passages with ghosts of dead Knights of the Cross, ever eager for Zmudzian blood. The depth of that passage was not known; it might be very deep, made purposely so centuries ago to serve as a trap for aggressors. The moaning was like the plaintive crying of red owls living in old ruins.

All this passed through Mark's head, quick as lightning, while he was making the opening wider, but it did not deter him from his work.

He had on a long leather belt; with trembling hands he fastened it to a tree growing near the opening, the other end he twisted round his hand, made the sign of the cross and disappeared under the ground.

He fell on a heap of rubbish and rotten leaves; he was in complete darkness, only overhead there could be seen a piece of blue sky and Margas's head—to right and left was a narrow passage.

The moaning ceased, and again he was in despair. That voice was an illusion of his shattered nerves. He was not afraid, but the momentary excitement had left him. Why had he come here? Perhaps the dog scented a badger? How could he think to find his beloved in that hole? He must be mad. . . .

While he stood thinking thus, and ready to seize the leather strap and climb up again, his blood suddenly stopped circulating in his veins and perspiration bathed his forehead. Somewhere in that horrid, dark deep resounded the same faint moaning. Margas whined more and more.

Mark advanced a few paces, holding on to the wall. His teeth chattered.

'Who is there?' he asked aloud, searching in his pocket for a match, but his hands dropped, he stood as though struck by a thunderbolt.

From the dark deep there came to his ears a feeble, fainting voice—it was changed, it had lost its silver-like tone and liveliness, but familiar—oh! how familiar!

'It's you, Mark? I knew you would come, but . . . I can't any more. . . .'

Then the moaning sounded again, and after that silence.

A match shone in the darkness. Several bats, frightened, flew near his face; an owl flew from a moulding in the vault, and, mak-

ing an awful noise with its heavy wings, went further on, dusting the walls; the match lighted the corner for a moment, then expired, but Mark did not light another. He had perceived the young girl, lying motionless, as though dead—her head resting on a stone.

He knelt by her side.

'O God! O God!' cried he. 'Is there a better Father than Thou, or a better Lord than Thou?'

He knelt a while, mad and impotent from happiness as he had previously been from despair; then the blood rushed to his tortured heart, and poured into it in warm, young waves full of energy.

He took the lost girl in his arms and directed himself towards the opening.

The night was already dark. Irene, fainting and motionless, hung heavy in his arms. Holding her with one arm, he succeeded, with the help of the other, in climbing out; he deposited her on the ground. He was afraid at her having fainted; he stood a while, not knowing what to do, and pushed aside Margas, who was licking her hands and jumping round her.

The fresh air and the cool of the night restored the girl to her senses. Life returned to her face, and, sighing, she opened her eyes.

The thin face of the gloomy man bent over her, and this time it shone with happiness; he asked softly and with great solicitude,—

'Are you not hurt?'

'I sprained my foot, and it hurts dreadfully. Is it very late?' said she, with feeble voice, trying to smile.

'About nine o'clock. We have searched for you for twenty-four hours, which were worse than a century,' said he, sadly.

'I believe you, for it seemed so to me, but I was sure you would find me. Had it not been for my foot, perhaps I could have got out by myself. But, being in such dreadful pain, I could neither move nor cry for help. I moaned and fainted by turns. I was very thirsty, and at last I cried, seeing how helpless I was. I hated to die like that. When I heard the dog I was sure it was Margas, and that you would come soon, but I was not strong enough to call. How pleasant it is to live!'

She breathed, and then shivered.

'How cold!' she whispered.

'May I carry you home?' said he, timidly.

'Of course! I hope you will not leave me here, and I can't walk. But you are wounded, and your clothes are torn. Where is your coat and cap?'

'I don't know anything that has happened to me since last evening,' said he, smiling.

He took her in his arms, and started homeward through the thicket, guiding his course by the splashing of the river. He did not feel the burden.

'How cold!' whispered she, after a while.

He had nothing to wrap her in, but his heart was throbbing with warm, great love, which had already conquered everything.

'Why do you smile?' asked she, looking at him.

'From happiness,' answered he, merrily and frankly.

She became silent for a moment.

'Why were you not happy two months ago? Nothing has changed! And how have we passed that time? Were you pleased? As for me, I wasn't. Every day I thought you would come, and every day I grew sadder and sadder. I was very disappointed in you, I thought you were better than you really are, perhaps even now you will carry me to my empty house, and, satisfied, will take leave of me for ever and go proudly away? I shouldn't be at all surprised!'

'I sha'n't go, and I am not proud any more . . . I prefer to suffer slanders, to be in the position of your servant, but I couldn't bear another day like that! I can bear anything but such a sorrow. You said once that my soul would be put through the fire, that it might become softer . . . That night and that day have given it the shape you wished . . . That night has overpowered me, and in presence of it I am humble as a good child.

He spoke hesitatingly. She had been

right, and she had a good opportunity of avenging herself for his refusal. It's true that she smiled triumphantly, but, instead of revenge, she put her arms round his neck and rested her dark head on his shoulder, and he, unable to say a word, pressed her to his breast.

'Does your foot hurt much?' asked he, softly.

'I had forgotten all about it,' answered she; 'but I suppose I shall suffer later in Poswicie. Now I am so comfortable . . . But I must be very heavy for you to carry?'

'I had forgotten I was carrying anything,' said he, joyfully. 'I had forgotten. Later, in Poswicie, I shall feel it.'

They smiled at each other.

'Wejdawutas, you sha'n't criticise tales any more,' said she, jestingly. 'Where will you find now the abyss separating us? Our road is the same, our aim is the same, our two hearts are one . . . Do you want anything else? What joy it is to live! What bliss!'

'What bliss!' repeated he, softly, looking at her.

'Who told you first about my disappearance?'

'Yesterday evening Sawgard brought me the sad news. During the last two months I have been wrestling with myself; how stupid I was to think that I could conquer love—such love! I worked day and night,

I have made plenty of money; money grew in my hands, and weakness increased in my heart. Lord! Lord! What torture! And what for? I avoided Poswicie. I trembled, thinking I might meet you accidentally. And what for? During the night I stole into the park like a thief, only to look at the house in which you lived. I was there three times. I cursed and despised myself, and two weeks later I went there again. . . . Such is the strength of my will!'

Irene's arms encircled his neck more closely; he felt her respiration near his lips, it warmed him like a flame.

He bent a little, and that cold, proud man, quiet, like an Olympian god, did not even realise when he kissed his princess. His kiss was warm and long, for he was mad with love and happiness.

Then they did not speak again. He, perhaps, was punishing himself for that lack of will and strength; she, resting her head on his shoulder, smiled and dreamed, paying no heed to her pain, not complaining even of the cold.

Suddenly she came to herself, for he stopped.

'Where are we?' asked she, indifferently.

'Near the river. I must leave you here and go and fetch a boat. You are not afraid?'

'Are you far from me that I should be

afraid? Put me under a tree and leave me our dog, I shall wait patiently.'

He placed her carefully and departed.

A few minutes later the oar splashed. The river was bearing them to Poswicie.

In the park he took her again into his arms. The servants were not yet asleep in the *château.* Many of them were scattered in the courtyard, crushed by the sad event. Suddenly, amidst the whispering of the quiet of night, there resounded like an archangel's trumpet, Certwan's sonorous voice,—

'Open the door!'

'Jesus of Nazareth! Our lady!' shouted the first who approached.

There was great excitement. Everyone lost their heads.

Hundreds of questions were asked, hundreds of exclamations were heard. And amidst this confusion Irene laughed, happy at their solicitude, while Mark looked at her, as at the sun, and was radiant.

'Only my aunt can attend your sprained foot,' said he. 'Julka, put the lady to bed, and I will fetch my aunt.'

'Wait till your carriage is ready,' said Irene. 'Meanwhile we will have our betrothal banquet.'

Half-an-hour later Mark rushed to the vicarage as fast as the horse could go.

They were not asleep there either, for they had become uneasy about him, and

Rymko was just going with Grenis to search for him.

Mark rushed into the room like a storm.

'Good evening,' he exclaimed joyfully.

'They were frightened, for they thought he was mad.

'Miss Orwid is alive!' he cried.

'Miraculous Virgin!' exclaimed Ragis, staring at him. 'Where did you find her?'

'She fell by an accident into one of the subterranean passages—there in the blackberry bush thicket.'

'Such are always the consequences of being a *gourmand*. Naturally! The girl wanted some berries. What a trouble there is with children and women!'

'Glory to the miraculous Holy Virgin!' said Miss Aneta. 'Is she well, poor thing? So many hours of fright and hunger!'

'She has sprained her foot.'

Miss Aneta did not listen any further, but trotted to a chair on which lay her jacket. Mark followed her, not knowing what she was looking for.

'Aunt, will you be kind enough to go and see her, and attend to her foot?'

'Immediately, my dear boy, only I must dress a little more warmly, and take some herbs,' said she, putting on her jacket.

'I thank you most heartily. I should like to ask you one favour more . . .'

'Perhaps you would like me to stay there till she is well?'

'She would not dare ask you, but she would be very glad. She is alone.'

'Why should she not dare? It's happiness to be able to do anything for others. I will stay with her, be at ease. And where is your carriage, for it's not proper to be long in going to see someone who is sick. I am ready.'

'The carriage from Poswicie is waiting for you. Thank you with all my heart!'

'Good-bye, my dear boy. I have prepared linen and clothes for you. Kindly give him something to eat, and warm him up. May Jesus be blessed!'

Mark helped her into the carriage. When he returned, Ragis looked into his eyes and shook his head.

'My boy, you have suddenly become so handsome,' said he, winking his eye.

'Then before to-day I was homely?' said the young man, and his teeth showed as he smiled.

'No, you were not homely, but some way peculiar. Reverend, is it not so?'

'Yes, yes,' assented the priest, bringing a bottle of mead and three glasses.

The young man accepted the drink and emptied the glass at one draught. As he moved his hand something shone on his finger that was not there the day before.

'What is this?' cried Ragis, seizing him

by the hand. 'How did you manage to get the Orwids' ring, you good-for-nothing?'

'Half of it,' answered Mark with ease, 'was given me by father, the other half I got from America.'

'Aha, naturally! The Orwids' coat-of arms, a young girl on a bear. It's just fit for you!'

'And how soon will you have the banns published?'

'Soon!' said he, smiling and growing red.

'For Heaven's sake! Where is my foot? Who will lead the dancing? At anyrate God is merciful!'

'May He be praised!' whispered Mark.

'What? Do you regret Martha?' rejoined Ragis, rubbing his hands. 'Woynat threatened that you would become a good-for-nothing, but that's his case, poor thing, and not yours. Thus it always is with one to whom I am godfather! Ho, ho, ho! Naturally! In a year we shall return to Skomont with the young lady.'

Mark stretched himself, his eyes shone.

'Some time ago I told you that the Zmudzian would remain, but you didn't wish to believe me and you discouraged me. Do you remember?'

'Yes, I said it, for I did not want you to sink still deeper. Ho, ho! I poured oil on the fire. And who told you the tale about Wejdawutas? I and black Julka knew

how the grass grew. Naturally! I helped you as much as I could, for I had become very fond of your girl. Upon my word, she is a good soul. She gave me a hedgehog, and how intelligent he is!'

'Ragis, I repeat to you that you are too fond of animals,' admonished the vicar.

'But you never permit me to explain my theory. I am sure I could convince you,' said the old man, ready for a long discussion.

'Don't say that, Ragis!' and the priest defended himself by putting his fingers in his ears.

'It's always thus with you. Naturally!' muttered the cripple.

That night Mark slept as sound as a log, and the next morning Ragis was obliged to shake him before he was able to wake him.

'Have you forgotten that you have one more duty?' cried he. 'Get up! They have sent for you from Poswicie, apparently Miss Aneta! Umph! Naturally Miss Aneta, as though she would ever dare to bother you! Inspect your wedding clothes and march!'

Certwan sprang from his bed, dressed himself in a few minutes and went off, while the cripple hobbled towards the village, smoking a pipe and speaking to himself,—

'Ho, ho, ho! Naturally! He rushed at the position! She has drilled him well, and quickly too. When girls ask me for a love

potion, upon my word I will send them to Poswicie. For if she could tame my boy, then there is no greater sorceress in the world.'

He became thoughtful, shook his head, twisted his moustache and hummed,—

'There was an old woman of noble birth,
Who had a very stubborn nanny-goat!'

He did not say what became of the old woman and her nanny-goat, for he entered the street of Sandwile, where he was surrounded by petty-noblemen, asking after Miss Orwid.

He therefore postponed his rhapsody to a more convenient time.

CHAPTER XII

A YEAR later the linden trees surrounding the old Orwid *Château* were covered with scented blossom. Millions of bees circulated among the large boughs, while beneath them worked many caravans of industrious ants and several laborious people. Notwithstanding the warm noon, no one was lazy, even old Filomen pretended to be busy, walking from room to room and wiping imaginary dust from the furniture.

The linden trees looked into the open windows, throwing waves of honey-sweet scent and silvery petals into the rooms; the bees, encouraged by the tranquillity in the house, were bold enough to reach as far as the bald head of the butler; he could not hear them.

It seemed that there was no one in the *château*, only in one room was there heard human steps and the moving of furniture.

The interior of that room was very original.

There were plenty of shelves, on which were kept hundreds of different things prepared by the industry of woman. What a variety! Bunches of dried mushrooms,

large bottles of vinegar, rows of bottles with liquors in which various kinds of fruit were steeped, pots of preserves, jams, heaps of yellow wax and white flax.

On the walls were suspended garden tools and bunches of dried herbs and flowers, and the centre of the pantry was occupied by a large table, over which a woman was bent, putting scented raspberries from a basket on to cut-glass plates.

The bees came here also, attracted by the scent of honey and wax, they flew over the raspberries; the woman raised her head and looked with pleasure on the industrious workmen. She was so fond of indefatigable work.

Suddenly someone pushed aside the linden-tree branches and a shadow was projected.

'Aunt! I have been searching everywhere!' cried a clear young voice.

The woman dropped her spoon, and the honest face of Miss Aneta turned to the window.

'For whom are you searching, my child?' asked she, with some uneasiness.

Irene's dark head appeared; the girl leaned against the window and laughed at the old lady, her bright brown eyes gleamed, her white teeth showed between her coral lips. She was beautiful in the brightness of the sun and with that expression on her face.

'For whom? Naturally for you, my only faithful companion. Since this morning

I am like an enchanted princess. My husband has left me, Julka and Marwitz are gone. I have done my work and searched for you everywhere. Have you prepared those berries for our guests?'

'They will be back in about an hour. They will be dusty and glad to refresh themselves with berries. Would you not like some, my beautiful one?'

'With great pleasure, for I have swallowed enough dust. I have visited three farms. That horrid Mark stays in Kowno and leaves all the troubles for me.'

'My dearest, he doesn't stay there for his own pleasure, he must! but my cards have told me that he will be back soon. Here are your berries.'

'Thank you, aunty. It seems that our sorcerer is not well. I have sent Clarke to see him.'

The worst sickness is our old age. What could we not do if we had young arms and feet? We work and work, but we never do enough.'

'Do you think you don't work enough? I should like to see who would do more!'

'My dearest child, it's your good-heartedness that speaks in that way, but what is true is true. For that God bestows on you His favour and He will continue to do so. Go, little bees, go into God's world, for I must shut the window.'

'Where are you going? You drive me away together with the bees.'

'I must go into the garden, then to the village, for I understand there are many children sick with whooping-cough. I have a herb for that too.'

Irene was about to say something, when the noise of a carriage was heard on the road.

She listened, and blushed with joyful hope.

'Perhaps it's he?' whispered she to herself, going swiftly towards the verandah.

'It must be Clarke,' said she in a calmer tone, recognising that it was not the noise of the post-carriage.

The wheels resounded on the stones of the courtyard and stopped.

'I am sure it must be some visitors,' sighed Irene. 'There will be plenty of talking about nothing; inquisitive looks and gossip. I don't wonder Mark doesn't like visits.'

She entered the verandah from the side of the garden and threw her hat and her gloves on the table.

At that moment Filomen's younger help entered and announced,—

'Mrs Certwan of Skomont.'

Irene's radiant face became sober. A cold shadow covered her bright eyes, she bit her lips, and without saying a word went to meet the rare visitor. They had not seen Mark's step-mother for a year.

The welcome was accomplished in the

drawing-room, according to ceremonial etiquette.

Mrs Certwan, clad in a satin dress, and red from embarrassment, seated herself on the sofa, Irene sat on a chair opposite her.

'What a lovely house you have!' began the widow. 'What beautiful flowers! Nothing is lacking here to make home sweet. How happy you must be!'

'Nothing would be lacking to my happiness even without flowers and luxuries,' said the young woman, smiling.

'Yes, yes,' assented Mrs Certwan, sighing.

At that moment a large grey dog entered through the door from the garden, and lay down at his mistress's feet, looking distrustfully at the guest. Mrs Certwan pulled her satin dress hastily, while Irene caressed the dog.

'Margas, go and see if your master is coming,' she said.

He understood, for he rose and left the room.

Then Mark is not at home?' said Mrs Certwan, uneasily.

'No, madam, he has not yet returned from Kowno.'

'I am very sorry. I wished to present to both of you my hearty good wishes. Circumstances prevented me from being present at your wedding. . . . I was very sorry.'

'We were also sorry,' answered Irene, laconically. 'Only Kazimiez came to our

wedding — he alone represented Mark's family, and I am grateful to him for doing so.'

'Poor Witold was very sick. I could not leave him, although I wanted very much to congratulate Mark.'

'I think it's I who should be congratulated. Returning to Kazimiez, he asked Mark to his betrothal with Miss Jazwiglo. They also deserve our most hearty wishes, for both are very good-hearted.'

'Ah!' moaned Mrs Certwan. 'I understand Kazimiez is going to have a shop.'

'That's nothing bad,' said Irene, shrugging her shoulder. 'Strictly speaking it is not a shop, but an agency. To be an honest merchant is as honourable as to be an honest official or landowner.'

'Yes, yes, but Kazimiez might settle on his estate. He had no debts, and Mark would have given up the tenancy.'

'My husband never gives up plans once conceived. Kazimiez sold him his portion willingly.'

'I know, I know Mark very well. We also must give way to him. Have you heard the result of the trial that was held last Tuesday?'

'Mr Rymwid told me about it yesterday. Witold has not refrained from living fast, and the liabilities exceed the assets of the estate.'

'Alas! poor boy, he struggled like a fish in a net, but misfortune persecuted him. We are now like wrecks on Mark's mercy, and our only refuge is your good heart.'

'My good heart?' said the young hostess, frowning. 'I can assure you that it's nothing bad to be at Mark's mercy. He never takes advantage of circumstances as others do.'

'I know he is the best man possible, but what shall we do now, without land, without money, without even a house to live in? Witold would like to try some career, but what? I should like to accept some position, but in the meanwhile where could we live? You alone can ask Mark to do something for us, and especially for his younger brother. Pray promise me your protection.'

'I can assure you that he will do it of himself. He is not revengeful. I expect him every minute. You may talk with him. It's only a pity that Mr Witold is not here.'

'He was coming with me, but he met Mr Marwitz on the road and left me for more congenial company. They went to visit Ragis, where they expected to meet Hanka with her friend. They must soon be here.'

'They are here already, I recognise the noise of the carriage.'

A moment later Julka entered through the widely-opened door, humming joyfully, followed by Hanka with a thoughtful face, by Marwitz, quiet, as always, and by Witold, unusually modest, worried, and uncertain how he would be received.

'Ragis is well,' announced Julka, after

greeting; 'he promised to come here to-morrow with report and thanks.'

'He was very pleased that you remembered him,' said Hanka, softly.

'And he is longing after Miss Aneta,' added Julka.

Witold saluted Irene bashfully from a distance, muttering something; his jokes, his humour as a rake and cynicism as a dandy had disappeared with his money. Without gold he was at zero.

The conversation became general, and, thanks to Julka, quite animated. Irene looked through the window oftener and oftener and listened.

Mrs Certwan turned all her attention and favours to Marwitz.

'You have not been long in our country?' asked she, smiling.

'I came with these ladies,' answered he, pointing with his eyes to Hanka.

'Do you intend to stay long?'

'Until the departure of these ladies.'

'In two weeks, then,' said she in a tone of condolence. 'You must be worried in Zmudz?'

'I? Worried?' exclaimed he, opening his pale eyes wide. 'With these ladies? And fishing? I enjoy being here immensely!'

Irene mingled in the conversation.

'Clarke, your enjoyment will not last long. Any day George may come to Libawa, and take you home, willing or un-

willing. And it will be only right. I am ready to help him.'

'You know, Irene, that I sha'n't go!' he answered with his quiet stubbornness.

'Who makes attempts on the freedom of our colleague?' asked Julka.

'His own brother, by his father's command.'

'What do they want from me?' muttered the American. 'George will return as he comes. I am fond of peace above all things.'

'And you disturb your own family!' said Irene, laughing.

'It's not like Mr Marwitz,' rejoined Mrs Certwan.

During this conversation two voices sounded from the gravel road in the garden, a woman's soprano and a man's bass. They approached the verandah, and as Mrs Certwan finished her last word the door leading to the drawing-room opened softly, and there appeared the long-expected master of the house.

'At last!' exclaimed Irene, rising from her chair. 'Where have you come from on foot?'

'Good evening. I learned that godfather was ill, and I went directly to the village. I have come from the river.'

'From Devayta,' corrected his wife.

'Let it be as you wish. I visited my old friend the oak.'

He kissed her hands fondly. They greeted each other with warm looks and smiles of happiness. Then, without showing any surprise, he bowed to his step-mother and greeted the other guests.

'What news of Kazimiez?' asked Mrs Certwan.

'Yesterday we celebrated his betrothal. He intended to come with me, but, as he postponed it and I did not want to wait, he remained, promising to come soon to see mother. He is very satisfied with everything. Marwitz, I have a letter and telegram for you,' added he, turning to the American.

'George is waiting,' laughed Irene.

'Let him wait,' decided Marwitz, quietly, putting letter and telegram into his pocket.

Miss Aneta appeared on the threshold, the raspberries were brought after her.

Mark sat near his wife. His step-mother's and Witold's presence made him gloomy. He was silent, twisting his moustache. He expected a new attack on his peace.

Julka first, as always, understood there would be a family quarrel, during which she, her friend and Marwitz would be superfluous. She made a sign to Hanka, and they both went into the park. It was not necessary to call the American. Scarcely had the door closed behind the girls, when he rose, and, sighing, rushed in the same direction. Miss Aneta, having given

Mark some raspberries, kissed him cordially, and left also, for she considered it a sin to be idle.

Those who remained were silent, and looked at each other for a while. Witold rose and pretended to look at a picture, Irene handed her husband a cigarette, Mrs Certwan turned uneasily on her chair, not knowing how to begin to talk business. Mark was exercising a crushing influence on her.

Irene understood the situation, and broke the silence.

'Mark, Mrs Certwan came to talk to you. She is uneasy as to what will become of her when the Skomont estate is your property.'

'Mother has lived there ten years during my administration. It seems to me that she did not lack anything.'

'Then you permit me to live there? You won't drive me away?' exclaimed she.

'For whom do you take me? Where did you get such an idea about me? One must not judge other people by one's self, but by their deeds.'

'May Witold remain also?' she interrupted, growing crimson.

'No! Your age gives you a right to live peacefully and comfortably. He must go and learn how to work. I don't propose to permit him to be a lazy good-for-nothing. There is no room for him in Skomont. . . .'

Mrs Certwan began to cry. The boy's

face changed: one could see he was ashamed and angry.

'I am not going to beg for your bread, you may be sure of that. I prefer to die from hunger. I am going away to-morrow.'

Irene, by her look, restrained Mark, who, as was his custom, was about to say something hard.

'Mr Witold,' said she, gravely but cordially, 'we mustn't treat this subject angrily. It is not a question of your dying, but of your rising. Mark doesn't grudge you bread, but he requires you to work. Let us discuss the question of work quietly. Let us search for it together.'

'It's not easy,' he muttered.

'Why not help Kazimiez in his business?' said Mark.

'Never!' cried the boy. 'Here, where everybody knows me? No, I would prefer to go to Siberia!'

'Poor fellow, he could not stand such a change of social position,' sighed the mother. 'He wishes to enter the army.'

'That's a bad career,' rejoined Mark, 'with his passionate temper.'

All became silent and thoughtful, suddenly Irene turned her face towards her husband and said with animation,—

'Mark, what do you think of Drake City?'

'You think he could be useful there? Witold, would you go to America?'

'With pleasure, for here I am disgusted with everything,' answered the boy. 'Perhaps there I may meet with better luck.'

'So far! Beyond the seas!' said his mother, clasping her hands.

'You must make some sacrifice,' said Mark. 'You will wish him farewell now, crying, and maybe, several years hence, you will receive him with joy. I will consult Clarke about it.'

He rose and went into the park. A few minutes later he returned with the American.

'You save me, sir!' cried he. 'I will give you to my brother instead of myself! There, beyond the ocean, you shall find a family, home, and my cotton-mill. I give you everything, for I don't intend to return, I have a duty here.'

'We shall hear the story of the unfortunate ring for the hundredth time,' whispered Irene to her husband, joyfully.

'You have helped me out of a great trouble! Perhaps there, in America, that doll will become a man,' said Mark.

It was indeed the solution of that very difficult question.

Witold became serene, Mrs Certwan brushed away her tears, and Marwitz told marvels of the life beyond the Atlantic. Peace returned.

. . . . . .

Then they departed joyfully, a good under-

standing having been established between them. Evening had come.

As formerly, in the left wing of the château there stood a group of employees, only now increased by those who came for orders from Ejniki, Budrajce and Skomont. The same fair-haired giant was giving short, positive orders, with the evident desire of finishing as soon as possible.

Then there resounded in unison,—

'Good-night, sir!'

'Good-night to you!' answered he, closing the door.

An unheard of thing! Mark Certwan was humming. Evidently Irene had taught him that.

All were sleeping, she alone waited for him, leaning against the window.

'Have you finished?' said she, cordially, holding out her hands.

'Yes,' said he, gravely, stretching himself proudly. 'All my plans are accomplished! The land is mine! I have got it back, as I promised myself, and my old oak will stand for centuries. To-day it rustled to me as though it were young!'

'Oh, how superb, you Wejdawutas!' laughed she, teasingly. 'And do you remember what you said a year ago about those fearful abysses, sorrows, tortures? You have conquered all! There was a legion of foes—you were alone the hero!

Now it's time for you to rest and be happy. You have grown up, like Devaytis, to be set as an example to future generations. Now you lack nothing.'

'No! I have reached my goal! I can rest,' whispered he, looking at the starry sky.

After a while he muttered as though to himself,—

'I yet lack something! But I can't get it. The oak rustles that everything passes, and that everything is nothing when compared with God's might! The great oak looks and knows better than we effeminates. Everything passes! And even if it did not pass . . .'

His eyes shone, and he added stubbornly, through his set teeth,—

'Whether that which should happen will happen or not, the Zmudzian will remain for ever!'

'Will remain!' repeated the echo of the quiet night among the hundred-year-old linden trees, and that tremor of nature passed to the waves of the Dubissa and the tops of the oak grove.

'Will remain!' the whole earth, made up of catastrophes, losses and continual struggles, seemed to repeat the words. It affirmed what its son had said.

THE END

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